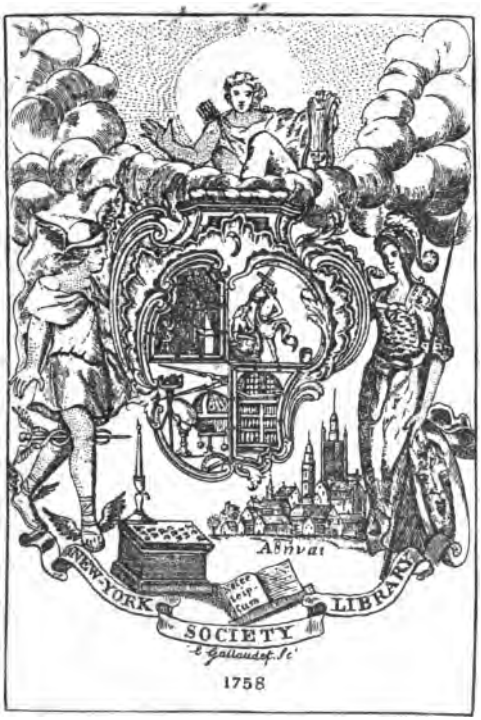
The VILLAGE PEST

A STORY OF DAVID

MONTGOMERY ROLLINS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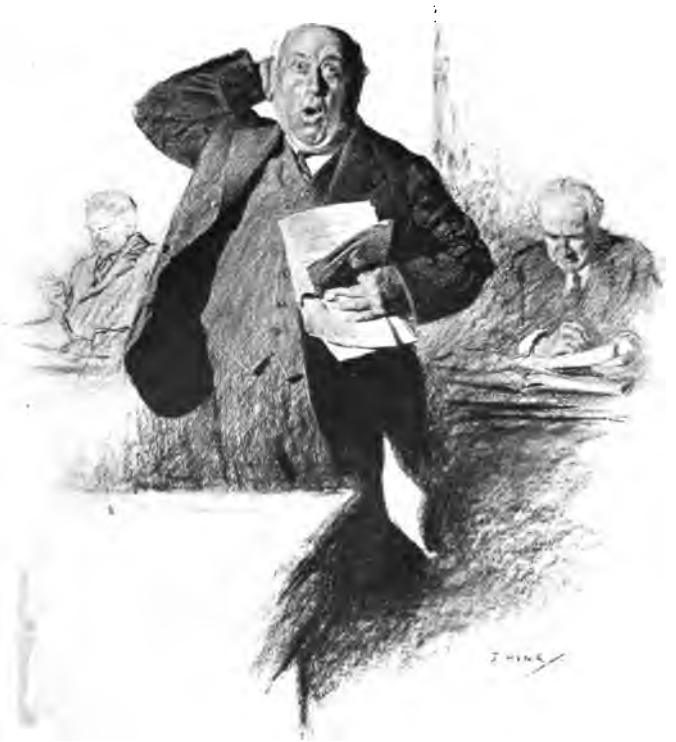

"GENTLEMEN, I REPEAT! NOTHING IN ALL MY EXPERIENCE HAS EVER STRUCK ME SO FORCI——"—*Page 165.*

THE VILLAGE PEST

A Story of David

By

MONTGOMERY ROLLINS

Author of other works, which, being of a serious nature, are quite foreign to the subject in hand

ILLUSTRATED BY J. HENRY

BOSTON

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

1917

Published, August, 1917

THE VILLAGE PEST

Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO
NORWOOD, MASS.
U. S. A.

DEDICATED TO

S. W. R.

WITHOUT WHOSE INSPIRING
ASSISTANCE THIS LITTLE
STORY WOULD NOT
HAVE BEEN TOLD

PREFACE

The facts upon which this little tale have been built are substantially as related. So far as is known, the juvenile characters mentioned are alive at this time. The old homestead, on the southern isle, is outwardly much the same as when David visited it; the half-mile semicircle of negro quarters, built of oyster shells — although crumbling with age — with the unequaled avenues of palmetto, live oak, or cedar, radiating from it, and many other unusual attractions, continue to mark it as one of the most beautiful and picturesque examples of plantation days still extant.

The Lawrence House, in Washington, was located on that part of East Capitol Street now covered by the ground of the Congressional Library. It was the last to be torn down during the process of destruction and construction, for it was used as an office from which the work was carried on during that period. Pictures of it are to be found in the library.

David's intimate life, in the midst of the digni-

fied body of the United States Senate, is no exaggeration. His familiarity with men whose names will ever be celebrated as statesmen, we fear but wrought another proof of the old adage that familiarity breeds contempt. But they were all tolerant of his good-natured ways, and, although he never could view them as superior beings, yet to most of them he accorded a fair degree of friendliness, and, ofttimes, too much of his doubtful companionship.

The ancient dungeon, beneath the dome, is yet to be discovered if one can but find the old negro guardian of its ponderous key, and convince him that this present storage-room was once a yawning receptacle for evil-doers.

The celebrated harpsichord, at Mt. Vernon, is now carefully railed in beyond the reach of the desecrating hand of the curio-collector, with the ivory key-top — so happily recovered by the guard — once more fastened in its accustomed place.

David's family, in its yearly migrations, moved in somewhat of a regular cycle. As the spring progressed, northward they took their way; first to the homestead at the State Capital, to be followed, as the season advanced, by removal to their summer home — a typical New England farm — there to remain through the delightful harvest

months, and for the full enjoyment of a rare Thanksgiving; thence back to Washington in time for the convening of Congress. Thus the years wore round.

If any there be who are curious to know what part of New England was blessed by David with his occasional presence, we will enlighten them to the extent of disclosing that the family domiciles were in that State the soil of which a celebrated atheist once most unjustly described as being "no good before you cultivated it, and neither was it afterwards."

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THE VILLAGE PEST

A STORY OF DAVID

CHAPTER I

A DRY AFTERNOON

"I DON'T care, Bill Dow spit in my ear first."

"Hush, child, don't let any of the neighbors think you use that coarse word or have the vile habit it suggests!" was the low-voiced admonition of the middle-aged woman who, by a firm grip on his left ear and a dexterity born of long practice, was guiding her offending offspring, aged twelve, towards the front door of a large, rambling New England house of a pre-Revolutionary type.

"You wouldn't let him spit in yore ear, would you?" persisted the boy. "Ain't nobody goin' ter spit in — Ouch! Quit that!" as the pressure on the ear became intensified.

"Hush! Hush! No, David. I should not permit such an insult if I could prevent it, but, anyhow, I wouldn't pay back in the same disgusting fashion."

"Well, I didn't, but once, an' I got in a good one. Then we clinched, an' I started his claret," was the boastful claim of David, who evidently had picked up some of the picturesque language of the prize-ring.

"Started his what?" demanded his puzzled parent, as with a sudden movement of her arm she brought him about face on the front steps.

"Say, don't do that without lettin' a feller know! Yes, his claret, didn't yer see it all over him from his nose?"

"Well, if you mean the blood with which you adorned his face and clothes, I understand. But, David, I am not going to punish you" (the boy assumed a hopeful expression, destined, however, to be short-lived) "for standing up for your rights with a manly use of your fists, but I am going to teach you not to conduct another spitting — ugh! the vile word! — match upon the public streets, and never to use your saliva as a weapon."

Some of the words were a trifle beyond her unwilling auditor's understanding, but the situa-

tion as a whole was entirely within his comprehension.

The outlook appeared discouraging, and David suspiciously eyed a pocket in her skirt — that now obsolete treasury — in which his mother's free hand was almost unconsciously fumbling. Soon the hand withdrew a familiar small strap of the kind so commonly in use among boys for fastening on skates or carrying school-books. It was shaken out of its neat coil, simultaneously with the releasing of the boy's burning ear. They were at the foot of the front stairs now. With a wary eye over his shoulder, the culprit quickly led the way above, thence on to his own room, the usual chamber of inquisition on similar offending occasions.

The mother stopped for a moment to collect a few accessories needful for the expiation of his crime.

In one hand, she bore a tin foot-tub and a piece of cord; in the other, her son's discarded little chair and the persistent strap. The boy viewed these preparations with an expression of mingled stoicism and puzzlement. He appreciated his mother's ready devices in dealing ingeniously with his shortcomings; he had a feeling that she made

the "punishment fit the crime" better than did other mothers he knew. These preparations, however, were most unusual, but he was not long kept in ignorance.

He was first seated in his little chair, which his pride, at least, had outgrown; the mysterious cord was utilized in tying him firmly to the foot of his bed, and, with the tin tub in good range, he was told to spit, the order being accompanied with a tingling sensation on his stockinged legs, where the strap clingingly took effect. But his mother played fair, he thought; she always held the strap by the buckle end; he knew of one mother, and had heard of a teacher, who hit with that end.

The long hot afternoon dragged out its tedious length, varied only by frequently recurring interludes of activity.

"Spit some more, David."

"S-p-tzzsm — I can't, Mother, haven't got none," sputtered the victim.

The uplifted strap encouraged a greater effort. "Say, don't! I'll try, perhaps there's a little under my tongue."

"There, that will do now, David. I'll be back in a few minutes," was his mother's doubtful consolation.

"Mother?"

"Yes, David?" questioningly.

"Got any gum?"

"No!" was the discouraging response. "What do you want of gum?"

"Well, I thought it might help make some more spit; I gotter have sumpthin'."

His mother turned to conceal an ill-suppressed smile, and was proceeding on her way, when she was suddenly addressed:

"Mother!"

"What is it now, David?"

"There's a piece of tar on my table. Gimme that! It's a lot better than nawthin'."

"No, David," shaking her head firmly, "you will have to learn this lesson without any gum, or tar, or such things. I've been here so long this time that I guess you can try it a little more now."

Then a little later:

"David?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Didn't Mrs. Thorndike stop and say something to you when you were fighting that Dow boy?"

"Ye-s-s! I — think — she — did," hesitating

and in the tone of one who would prefer to forget the episode.

"What did she say?" pursued his mother, gazing searchingly into his face.

"She said I ought ter be ashamed of myself fer fightin'; that God 'ud do sumpthin' or other."

"Then what did you say to Mrs. Thorndike?" continued the questioner, with a deep sense of misgiving.

"What, Mother?" evidently trying to gain time. The question was repeated.

"Why, I — I dunno," wavered the guilty one.

"Think hard, David!" with a suggestive motion of the strap.

"Yes, Mother, I'll try; guess I didn't say nawthin'."

"David, you had better think some more," urged Mrs. Hamilton relentlessly. "Mrs. Thorndike is to take a cup of tea with me to-morrow afternoon, and I feel quite sure she will remember."

The probability of an immediate application of the swaying strap — why could his mother not understand that such things made him nervous, and he had once heard the family doctor caution against overwrought nerves? — was the deciding

factor rather than Mrs. Thorndike's probable confession, or "tattlin'," as David inwardly viewed it.

"Oh, yes, Mother, I guess I know now."

"Well, David?"

"I said — I — said —"

"Yes!" looking at him apprehensively.

"Well, I said, 'Yer better mind yore own business or I'll spit enough in yore ear ter drown you.'"

"That all, David?"

"No-o, not quite."

"Well, go on!" The voice betokened gathering storm. Things looked ominous for the prisoner.

"Well, I said — yer see I'd drawn th' claret on Bill Dow then, an' knocked him out —"

"Never mind such bloodthirsty details, tell me what else you said," persisted the now thoroughly mortified parent, her face darkening.

"Then I said," the culprit at last confessed, in a tone of hopeless resignation, "'An' if that don't make yer lemme alone, I'll spit all over yore face an' wash yore paint off.'"

"David!" came the sharp command, "David, do it some more now! a good deal more!" The

begrudging process was often interrupted by yells and protestations, as the well-limbered strap did vigorous duty.

The red rays of the declining summer sun lay across the floor of David's room, and crept slowly up the wall, but the parental vigilance waned not. Until bedtime, he did yeoman service; it was a hard season for David. Whenever his mother came near, which he considered painfully often, he was forced to contribute to the tin tub. He spat until the flow gave out; he begged for anything to generate the necessary fluid. The roof of his mouth grew parched, his throat dry and sticky, and still he went through the motions. As his father laughingly expressed it afterwards, "he kept at it until his mouth was as dry as a covered bridge."

His mother's ingenious device conquered. David's enjoyment of that cat-like mode of offense and defense was gone, never to return.

CHAPTER II

"WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST!"

THAT winter, David's mother decided to pass several months at a picturesque old plantation on an island, off the coast of Florida, at the mouth of the Saint Johns River. The events related here occurred years ago, before this sandy peninsula had been invaded by Northerners; when its people lived more on fish and less on tourists. Because of this undeveloped state, the only practical method of transportation between this part of Florida and the North, was by means of a line of steamers that made irregular stops at a village located at the opposite end of the island from the plantation of which David and his mother enjoyed the hospitality.

Whether by preference, or otherwise, Mrs. Hamilton decided to take David along, rather than leave him to general family care at home — possibly it was deemed the safer of two obvious evils. However, that was the way of it, and the

visit passed with the boy alive and whole, although there were moments of great trepidation, occasioned by various and sundry exciting events,—such as seeing her precious charge pursued by wild cattle along a narrow path through the jungle-like vegetation, ending at a precipitous bluff, some ten feet above the tide. Over this, with a mingled sensation of relief and horror, she saw the fleet-footed youngster unhesitatingly plunge. It was not the arrogant confidence of a biblical Peter in waters of an unknown depth that spurred David to this apparent choice between the evils of the frying-pan and the fire, but a confidence born of an earlier investigation into the aqueous affairs of that particular spot, by which he had argued correctly — even in his life-saving frenzy — that the water could not be above his waist at that time of the tide.

She knew of his attaching himself to a party of negro laborers who went on an expedition to an adjacent island after marsh hay. Their cumbersome, leaky scow was heavy-laden, overhanging at the gunwales, and ponderously piled heavenward with an ill-advised load, to which numerous negroes annexed themselves and shoved off. David sat on the pinnacle of the heap in the

sublime contentment of imaginary captain. But the overloaded, leaky boat, with gunwales often submerged, soon encountered disaster, and Mrs. Hamilton beheld her hopeful drift rapidly seaward, calmly sitting on what was left of the fast disintegrating mountain of hay, while, hither and yon, the negroes, all expert swimmers, were saving themselves in total disregard of any obligation to their boy captain.

In great pride did the latter persist in remaining aboard — as all good captains ought — until the fickle deck should sink beneath his feet. Nevertheless, in spite of his lively verbal and physical remonstrances, the strong grasp of a plantation hand unceremoniously swept him into a skiff without respect for his nautical duties aboard the haystack.

There were other moments equally strenuous and wearing upon the nerves of one who sought rest and freedom from care in the gentle climate of that Southern isle.

The sojourn was good for David; he learned many useful things. Uncles, aunts, and cousins relieved their minds by contributing to this quieting end, for they devised occupations for his energies, with an idea of "tuckering him out."

Such trifles as teaching David to ride bareback, to the long jog of a hardy mule, developed a tendency to later rest. But David stuck to it, and followed along on the mule.

However, the visit drew to a close, and, in dangerous disregard of David's warning that his mother could go back North if she wanted to, but that he wasn't going, she packed up, and, with David in hand, was delivered at the wharf, which was crowded with freight and humanity.

The ocean steamship *Southland* was impatiently tugging at her hawsers; everything was bustle and excitement; the mate was rendering the air sulphurous with his urgent commands to the negro stevedores to "Look alive there, you black rascals, and rustle that freight aboard with more ginger!" The captain was hanging over the rail of the bridge anxiously watching the course of events, and with some reason, for he was nearly a day behind his schedule, because of a storm on the down trip.

"Freight all stowed, sir," shouted the mate. The captain was about to give the command to "cast off" when a woman, in great apparent disturbance of mind, made her way toward the bridge, and, with a gesture imploring delay,

exclaimed, in voice of suppressed anger and alarm, "Captain, my little boy, who came aboard with me, is missing. I think he has stolen off the boat, and is hiding on the wharf among the freight. He doesn't want to go home."

The captain smiled, although a little impatiently, as he rather tartly inquired, "Want me to hold the boat while you find him?"

"No, Captain!" she quickly replied, for Mrs. Hamilton — that hard-pressed mother — was a woman who could be depended upon in an emergency. "That would delay you too long, even if I had the temerity to make such a request, but, Captain, I wish you would order a lot of sailors on to the wharf there, and have them bring that boy on board."

The captain looked at her in silent admiration, then, quickly swinging on his heel, he gave the necessary orders. Scarcely had Mrs. Hamilton reached the gangway when, with gentle satisfaction, she beheld her energetic progeny, a writhing, struggling, biting and kicking human atom, turbulently heaving up the gangway, feet first, in the none too tender grasp of four vigorous sailors.

"Hold on to that youngster till we get clear of the dock!" shouted the captain, who had been a

stern and exasperated witness of the search and capture.

To a rattle of fiery commands, the gangway was closed; then the pulse of the propeller was felt as it began slowly to churn the water; the rubbing of the ship's sides against the piles sent out a resinous sound not unlike certain notes extracted from a fine-tooth comb covered with tissue paper and played upon with the mouth; the stretching of the hawsers holding the vessel's stern in against the wharf as the bow pointed outward to the channel strained and creaked like over-taut fiddle-strings. These and other fascinating matters incident to the getting under way were all affairs that quickly invited David's attention to the exclusion of his recent woes. Especially was he concerned over the probability that a hawser might part under the severe tension; so, as one was rent asunder with a mighty snap, he edified the mate, in direct charge of the proceedings, with, "There, any fool orter know th' dinged ole thing 'ud bust; why don't you fellers get on ter yer job?"

With suppressed rage, the one addressed gave a withering glance at the boy, and then thundered orders to right the trouble.

With such like able assistance from David, the ship was soon clear of the dock and under " full speed ahead " with her prow pointed for the deep Atlantic.

With the companionship of three other venturesome spirits, of about David's own age, each of whom had witnessed, in open-eyed amazement and admiration, the former's spectacular arrival upon the vessel, David found matters not too dull during the trip.

With natural fervor, the trio of new friends, out of regard to the foregoing episode, unreservedly placed the toga of leadership upon David's shoulders. And so affairs were well started — haply, we should say continued — before the *Southland* was fairly at sea. History, for this once, forsooth, is accurate in its claim that this band of freebooters numbered but four, but, seemingly, to those who were sufficiently seaproof to leave their state-rooms, and to the officers and others who were required to give occasional attention, at least, to duties incident to the voyage — from the captain to the stoker in the boiler-room — there were countless boys; no end of boys; boys everywhere and all the time. Ordinary hide-and-seek and such games, even

under the feet of the officers, might have been passed over with slight reproof. But such an attempted outrage as outfitting one of the life-boats with a most peculiar assortment of supplies, preparatory to an imaginary wreck and subsequent adventures upon a desert island, and the fact that this plot so nearly succeeded that the culprits were on the point of casting the boat free from its lashings when discovered by the watch, did not tend to ingratiate the offenders in the mind of a captain not predisposed to an extravagant friendliness towards our hero, because of the latter's spectacular advent on board, and already irritated by other exploits of a similar nature, and a slow trip.

To the prolific minds and fertile imagination of these four kindred spirits, each aiding and abetting the other, many opportunities to assist in the navigation and management of the *Southland* presented themselves.

The voyage up the coast, then one of considerable duration, was most unduly prolonged by a gale that held the ship storm-bound off Cape Hatteras for several days. When the storm subsided and passengers were once more allowed on deck, David and his band were the first through

the companion-way. It need hardly be suggested that this increased delay had not added vastly to the captain's poise or peace of mind, but details of that nature were entirely too trifling to merit the attention of David or his companions, who straightway proceeded to carry into effect a plan that had been held in check by their forced detention below.

By this time, it seemed certain to them that the ship must be on the verge of wreck, and that measures should at once be taken to save the passengers. As a means to that needful end, David took matters in charge.

"Remember, women an' children first!" he ordered, as they reached the heaving deck, "Now, follow me, an' each man stan' fast to his duty!"

By some means, they obtained access to the rope which controlled the fog-horn. In spite of its being a perfectly clear day, there suddenly bellowed forth such a tooting and whistling, in such frenzied tones and cadences, long toots and short toots, as no seaman would imagine even in his most feverish dreams. The uncanny blasts grew wilder and fiercer, throwing the already nervous and exhausted passengers into renewed fear and panic.

At the time, the overwrought captain was trying to take an observation, so as to determine the ship's location, for she had been driven far to sea. It was at the critical moment of his calculations that David and Company took the command out of his hands.

"Great guns! what's got into that damned horn?" he yelled to a sailor near by. "Stop it, quick!"

"Aye, aye, sir," the other returned, as he broke into a run.

"Avast there!" the captain suddenly shouted, as a look of understanding swept into his face, "I believe it's those damned boys. Bring 'em here! Get enough hands to catch 'em all! Heave ahead lively, now!"

It was done, and the turbulent tooting ceased, but not before a signal appeared on a not very distant vessel inquiring as to the nature of the distress. An embarrassing response was necessary. The captain, fully realizing how the commander of that steamship must view the situation, did not find his benevolent disposition materially augumented thereby.

The life-saving leader and his gallant crew, each in the charge of a willing tar, were lined up

before the irate captain, who abandoned his observation to quell this juvenile mutiny. With a face black with rage, he slowly looked them over; presently the impossibility of the situation fell upon him, and the uselessness of a tirade of words was only too clear. Then to his brain, long trained to emergencies, there came a plan that promised peace, so, with his face continuing to express ferocious anger and revenge, he thundered forth:

"Young men, do you see that yard-arm?" pointing with a shaking finger to its whereabouts. "In just one hour from now I shall hang you there by the necks until you are dead; dead! Do you hear? Let 'em go, men, so they can say a last good-by to their folks."

They did go, and stood not on the etiquette of their departure. For these young miscreants fervently believed in the unquestioned right of a sea captain to supreme command over passengers and crew — even unto taking away of life, if to him it seemed necessary.

David, like most boys of ten or twelve, had read and heard enough tales of the sea to have unbounded faith in this right and power.

Long before the expiration of the hour of grace

allowed the condemned youths, David, in direst alarm, sought cover where it would have tested the wrathful old sea-dog's patience to discover him. Provisioned for a siege, he stowed himself beneath the lower berth in his state-room, a mighty stockade of pillows shielding him at the fore.

CHAPTER III

A ROUGH-HOUSE

WE will now confess to the chief consideration that led to Mrs. Hamilton's decision to pass the winter in Florida.

For years, she had accompanied her husband to Washington, at the beginning of each regular session of Congress, there to remain until its early adjournment, or until the warm weather argued for New England latitudes.

In those days, hotel life in the Capital City was far from attractive and comfortable, and but few of those in higher political circles attempted it; thus, if one did not care to keep house, no very satisfactory solution of the problem presented itself. Mrs. Hamilton's care of a large household at their Northern home during the spring and early summer, followed by the management of even a larger establishment at their summer home in Rutherford with its host of ever-

changing guests,— an inevitable accompaniment of her husband's public life — made it imperative that her residence in Washington should be free from such cares. After numerous plans had been attempted, with but indifferent success, some old friends owning a house in the then fashionable part of the city extended an urgent invitation to pass the winters under their roof, and they accepted.

This offered a most happy solution of the vexed question. After making certain commercial arrangements, entirely satisfactory to all concerned, Senator and Mrs. Hamilton had taken their abode with Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence some three winters previous to the opening of our story. And David had also gone.

Without more ado, let us peruse the letter received by Mr. Hamilton during the early part of the previous November. It read:

WASHINGTON, D. C.

"MY DEAR SENATOR:

"I must repeat what I wrote in my previous letter, that we shall be pleased to provide for you and such others of your family as you desire, but, however disagreeable it is for me to say it, we cannot again take David.

"I note that you believe you could keep the

other boys of the neighborhood from making a common playground of our house, but I fear that you could not. I know these boys better than you do, and I have suffered from them. Already they begin to ask, 'How soon is David coming?' And the moment he should arrive they would be after him as their natural-born leader. They are anxiously awaiting his return to again go upon the war-path, and the crowd has increased.

"If you had seen the mud under the carpet and the carpets themselves and the broken glass and the general breakage of things last Session you would agree with me. I do not mean that David did all these things, far from it. I know he tried to control the rabble, but no one short of a magistrate could have done so. I cannot view a repetition of such things; our nerves would be hopelessly shattered. We must, somehow, put an end to this deplorable state of affairs.

"Some of these boys I actually fear. At times, they would keep Satan so busily occupied that ordinary sinners would get by unobserved. As to the parents, it is a delicate subject: I cannot safely talk about their offspring in a disparaging manner. It is naturally impolitic for me to tell Senator Peacham and Congressman Redwood that their sons shall not wade in the mud, and then come into my house three times a day and kick it off on the rugs and laugh and giggle over it because they pretend to come simply to see David. The way those two buccaneers ran wild over the whole house I fear would be

repeated again this Session, and none could prevent it.

"Now, Senator, I beg of you to understand that none of this is personal with David; he is a nice, polite, bright, manly boy himself, but his ingenious leadership brings the neighborhood clan about him, and he can hardly prevent it if he would. Thus our place becomes the general rendezvous, so we cannot have one boy — David — without a host of others. We would as soon have your son as any other boy — rather have him than any other — if it were only a question of having him alone. So you must see how it is.

"The relations of our families are so pleasant, and we so much enjoy the presence of you all, that it is very painful for me to say what I do, but there seems no alternative. I trust you will understand, and approach the matter in the most delicate fashion to your good wife.

"Yours faithfully,

"WILLIAM LAWRENCE."

It is to be feared that the last paragraph but one of Mr. Lawrence's epistle pardonably leaned a trifle in the direction of letting David "down easy," and particularly of sparing the feelings of Mrs. Hamilton. And there is a modicum of truth in that supposition — if we view it only from the standpoint of the writer of the letter. In the interests of justice, however, we must in-

sist upon the truth, and demand fair play for our hero on those rare occasions, such as this, when he chanced to deserve it.

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, each of more or less nervous temperament, were living a retired life on an income sufficient to give them more than the comforts of this world. They were without children, and thus welcomed the companionship of an increased family circle such as the older Hamiltons afforded. David had been a doubtful proposition to them from the start, for their own lack of experience with children filled them with grave apprehensions. Nevertheless, the first two winters passed in reasonable peace and quietness; David was younger and his friends less adventurous. But by the third season, the neighborhood boys learned to know David better, and, consequently, resorted in greater numbers to the Lawrence house. Even then all might have gone as well as one ought rightfully to expect, allowing some practical consideration for the ways of boys, had not the attitude of the Lawrences towards the band's many little harmless aggressions been conceived in blundering hostility — just the kind to stir up resentment on the part of healthy youth; and so there were re-

prisals. If the Lawrences had met the first trifling trespasses with firmness and good-natured remonstrances, there would have been little excuse for this chapter.

But not so. Blow for blow, the merry war went on, becoming fast and furious, though David sincerely tried to calm the growing animosity of his friends, who could not comprehend that these childless people were entirely without understanding as to the ways of youth.

We will relate here, for our mutual better acquaintance, the climax of this third winter under the Lawrence roof, which started David and his mother northward several weeks earlier than her spring plans had contemplated.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton were dining out on this disastrous evening, and the Lawrences were enjoying the company of some of their friends at their favorite pastime of whist. David had sought the quiet of the Hamilton apartments directly over the room in which the silent whist players were so deeply engrossed in their game. Here he was giving belated attention to a battered arithmetic that had the appearance of having rested all winter under a flower-pot. His struggles with the multiplication tables had just

led him to soliloquize "Ten times anything is easy; like ter cut out th' rest," when, about nine o'clock, a small, undersized individual, who, with entire disregard as to his sensibilities upon the subject, was dubbed "The Runt," stole silently in through the rear of the house, and sought David out.

"Hello, yer little Runt, how are yer to-night?" was the latter's greeting, as the little chap appeared in the doorway.

"Sh!" cautioned the visitor, stealthily looking around the apartment. "Are yer alone, Dave?"

"Nope, course not; got a mother an' father living, an'—"

"Oh, I don't mean that, yer fathead. Any one else at home?" glancing uneasily into the passageway from which he had just emerged.

"Naw," David returned, as he followed the other's eyes in a twinkle of expectation, while, in a more guarded tone, he inquired "What's doin'?"

Instead of replying to David's question, The Runt slowly called "Come on, fellers," and three more of David's companions came trooping in out of the darkness.

"Say, what's up?" persisted the puzzled host.

"Sh!" cautioned a boy named Mark Peacham, but familiarly known as "Sinker," because of his inability to master the buoyant art of swimming, and who had given the hardest and suffered the most from Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence. "We've got a ball an' some crooked-handled canes, an' let's have a game of shinny."

"Where?" questioned David, suspiciously.

"Right in this here room," was the ready reply. "We'll put a chair at each end, an' shoot in 'tween th' legs fer goals. There's jes' five of us; one of you-alls can sit over yonder on th' table where he'll be safe, an' umpire; one fer each goal; an' one on each side ter rush th' ball; that's jes' all of us."

"Make too much noise, won't it?" queried David, with visible hesitation.

"Naw, yer poor ham, sure it won't!" insisted another boy, called Candy Bob, for reasons self-explanatory. "We can take off our shoes, an' nobody will hear us. Gee! It's a cinch!"

David, scenting trouble, cautiously held out against their arguments for a brief space, but was finally disarmed by that species of persuasion reflecting upon his courage; such as, "Look at

th' Willie boy!" "Where's your sand?" "Be a sport!" and others of like significance. So the sides were chosen.

By the exercise of intelligent choice, David claimed the post of umpire, to which arrangement the others were suspiciously favorable. He was fortunate, indeed, in this, because, in the light of after events, his position on the table was less compromising.

Had he been a partner to the earlier whispered plans of his four friends when such remarks as "Ole tight-wad," "He's a mutt," "Lemony ole woman," "Rough-house," and the like, were much indulged in, his consent to the shinny game hardly would have been gained, for he had received certain parental warnings of a thoroughly understandable nature.

Thus this punitive career of disaster commenced. At first, the only untoward sound at all disturbing to the peace of the card-players was a peculiar shuffling of rapidly moving bodies in the room above. Mr. Lawrence cast a furtive, questioning glance at the vibrating chandelier directly over the table, and then went on with his dealing, while his wife fidgeting nervously in her chair, gazed anxiously at her husband, hoping to

catch his eyes in order to signal a warning of impending catastrophe; but to no purpose. The hands were arranged, and the game continued.

Above, matters were following the natural course inevitably associated with an endeavor to convert a moderate-sized drawing-room, well and even handsomely furnished, into a substitute for a roller skating-rink; in which to bang, whang, wallop, and sweep a fleeting ball, back and forth and in and out, among the legs of rare old mahogany furniture, against book-cases, and into countless other places; the pursuit endangering the physical well-being of all things in its course.

The game opened rather conservatively; the ball was kept in play by sliding the canes close to the floor with no attempt at spectacular moves. But this comparatively harmless pastime was destined to be of short duration. Sinker had "caged" the ball between the slender legs of a cherished Hepplewhite chair, in spite of Candy Bob's goal-tending opposition. With some show of feeling against an imperial decision of the umpire, yet another goal was won by Sinker and Company for the goal-keepers were not too faithful to their positions. Score: two to nothing.

There remains one of the players to whom we

have had no formal introduction — Sinker's partner and goal-keeper — the young Redwood so dubiously referred to in Mr. Lawrence's letter. He quite naturally answered to the nickname of "Reddy." In summary, it was Sinker and Reddy vs. Candy Bob and The Runt.

With the score two against them, the latter veterans held a secret conference before again plunging into the mêlée, and that is just what it suddenly became. For, as if acting upon a prearranged signal, both teams cast all discretion to the wind, and "played the game."

"Shoot, you Runt," yelled Candy Bob, as a good opening presented. With a vigorous backward swing, bent on securing greater impetus, The Runt hooked into a plant-stand supporting a large jardinière. His impetuous jerk slewed the affair in a most eccentric course over the polished floor until it brought up among the legs of the other players, all of whom performed a disastrous descent, desperately mixed with the costly porcelain, now shattered into a thousand fragments.

Shrill feminine screams of terror arose from below, where chill apprehension brought the card-players to a startled pause.

Candy Bob was first on his feet, seizing this

favorable opportunity to capture a goal. Score: two to one in favor of Sinker & Co.

Believing this startling and, as you might say, upsetting act on the part of The Runt an intended piece of unfair play, all members of the opposing team shouted their protests in hardy terms.

"Oh you sucker!"

"You dern sneak!"

"Ain't he got th' nerve?"

The Runt attested to his innocence, and was vigorously backed up by his own team, while the Umpire, undecided, held his peace, his innate relish of the situation considerably diluted by mental glimpses of the painful harvest unmistakably in store for him. The situation was quite out of his hands now; hence, reasoning from experience, he fully realized that the fray would go on to its calamitous end.

A few more terms of endearment having been exchanged between the opposing parties, the only true solution of the argument was recklessly sought, and the earlier hinted at "rough-house" was set in rapid motion. One need not venture very deep into the realm of prophecy to foretell the dire results.

Picture to yourself what would inevitably transpire as these four lusty youths struggled in the locked embraces of a maddened, rough-and-tumble fight, for we can but touch the peaks of disaster and destruction.

A gate-legged table was the first victim bagged, its legs closing with a crash, and thus freeing its leaves, which, in their collapse, deposited no end of things upon the floor, conspicuously and resoundingly, including a lamp, ornamented with a large glass shade. The next prey was a highly prized card-table, with one leaf resting against the wall. This leaf, suddenly released, as the table was swept from its bearings, broke away from its hinges, and crashed to the hardwood floor.

More panicky screams arose from the lower levels, and this time David distinguished a mingling of angry male tones.

Next; and next; and next? Will those in quest of further light be so helpful as to look around a sizable, generously furnished room of similar usage, and consider what might happen in such a time of stress? Fail not to consider the grandfather's clock and the sedative effect of its devastating fall upon a tormented audience be-

neath, held spell-bound by all this riot and rumpus. But does it occur to the reader's mind that the participants in this mix-up would land in a fireplace of commodious dimensions, and well stocked with ashes? But without heat; for that let us be devoutly thankful!

Yes, that, truly, was the sad outcome, and a great cry went up. The manner in which heads were rubbed in the smothering stuff was beyond all precedent; tearful eyes were filled with its smarting particles; faces were scraped against the sooty chimney sides. Those with heads and shoulders within struggled to get out, while scattering the contents of the chimney-place so that the air looked like a dirty snow-storm and the floor like that of a fertilizer factory. Those on top struggled with equal determination to avoid changing places with the choking sufferers beneath. And, all the while, their piercing war-cries filled the room.

But there let us leave these disgraceful warriors, who presented the gory appearance of having been strained through a barbed-wire fence, and return to the sedate party down-stairs. It may be observed that until the third goal there was nothing really positive enough to warrant in-

terference on the part of the Lawrences; only of sufficient moment to cause a cessation of play and bring anxious question to their faces.

From that instant, all that transpired in the Hamilton apartments moved with such marvelous rapidity that no expedition could possibly have reached its goal in season to prevent any of the wild adventures already described. Nor could Mr. Lawrence easily have disengaged himself from the frantic, nervous clutches of his panic-stricken wife, who threw herself into his arms when one of the glass shades over their heads fell with a shattering crash upon the card-table. There is good warrant to suppose that this shade was cast from its moorings — perhaps carelessly replaced after its last immaculate cleaning — when the jardinière so ignominiously felled the shinny-players overhead.

Over the shoulder of his fluttering wife, Mr. Lawrence gazed with deepening anxiety at the havoc being wrought. She was striving to control her hysterical sobs, when — we surmise as the result of the sudden prostration of the grandfather's clock — a large area of plaster disengaged itself from the ceiling, whence, falling in one vast sheet, it was perforated, for all the

world as paper-covered hoops in the circus, by the unhappy mortals so unfortunate as to have interfered with its smothering descent.

The stunning force of the blows received by the horrified wretches in the path of this avalanche did not allay their increasing disquiet. An earthquake of reasonable pretentions might do no more. The heaving laths now exposed over their heads, the swaying chandelier, the falling plague of dust and powder, all suggested to the peace-loving group that the whole structure was on the road to general collapse.

"William," gasped the choking hostess, convulsively, "take me away," as with a burst of nervous strength she urged her protector towards the door in an effort to escape from this reign of terror.

Another area of plaster gave way. With this last menacing cloudburst of noise and blinding dust, the four friends dashed precipitously into the single exit from the room, where each crowded the others; the two hunted and terrified females clutching and pulling at one another in dumb horror. Finally, they all scrambled through into the hall, where, with returning sanity, Mr. Lawrence stopped the rush, while

shaking his fist with impotent rage at the delirium going on above. After some show of force, he released himself from his frenzied wife, and placed her on a couch. Then, angrily muttering something to the effect that "those young scalawags are enough to make an infidel praise God," he rapidly mounted the stairs, and burst in upon the deprecating band, who seemed upon the verge of leveling the house to its foundations.

Here he freed his mind of a great burden.

But why continue? Enough has been related to make it clear why, following the receipt of the Lawrence communication, cited early in this chapter, David became *persona non grata* at the former's residence.

After a further exchange of letters, a compromise was reached, leading to the agreement that Mrs. Hamilton should not bring David to Washington until the early spring, acting on the belief that if he did not put in an appearance until that late day, his numerous friends would have formed other associations.

The why and the wherefore of the Florida trip seem now reasonably clear, but, for the sake of greater clearness of narrative, it should not be overlooked that the shinny game, just described,

occurred the winter previous. So now we once more find the Hamiltons settled at the Lawrence house upon the return of David and his mother from their southern visit.

But what was Mr. Hamilton's attitude of mind toward his son's exploits?

Although the former insisted upon strict obedience from David, nevertheless, it is surmised that he was not wholly lacking in sympathy with that young man's restless career.

He was not niggardly in his administration of justice, but it was strict justice, and all evidence of a palliative nature was admitted with the keen understanding that comes with a lively recollection of other boyhood days gone long before. David could recall no occasion when he had cause to complain of an unfair sentence. By this, however, it must not be inferred that there was any great lack of judicial decisions.

Above all, his father would permit nothing even approaching disrespect upon the part of David towards his mother, and never failed vigorously to support her after she had once issued her commands. This fact had been most painfully made clear to the boy one Sunday when she

had checked his early morning disappearance while he was attempting to escape church duty.

The affair took place in a long narrow hall. From a side door, at the rear of the hall, wholly unobserved by David, his father quietly entered just at the critical moment when the former had rather impudently assured his mother that he had no intention of attending divine service that day. Suddenly the boy, with a sensation akin to one upon whom the sheriff has taken a firm grip, felt a strong, sinewy hand gather in the slack of his garments in the region of his neck, while a determined voice sternly demanded:

"Young man, what was that you just said?"

David usually had the courage of his convictions up to a certain point; he was game, and harbored a strong aversion to receding from a position until completely outflanked, so, although he realized he was contributing to his own undoing, he stoutly replied, but in language much sterilized compared to that just addressed to his mother, "I said I wouldn't go ter church, an' I ar'n't — a —"

He got no farther. He abruptly began to revolve like the arms of a windmill, his feet first

touching the ceiling, next sweeping the floor, then brushing a side wall, until, finally, with a resounding thump, he was planted upon his feet, to the query:

"What was it I understood you to say?"

With humbled pride and a new appreciation of his father's strength and agility indelibly blazoned upon his memory by this sudden visitation, David ruefully mumbled, "I said I would go ter church, sir."

"Oh, very good; I thought I must have misunderstood your first statement," was the calm and expressionless rejoinder.

On the subject of David's intermittent churchgoing, we shall have more to say, but we will leave the subject of the latter's religious training for the time being, and return to the matter from which we have wandered.

That Mr. Hamilton cherished a real human sympathy with his son's versatile activities is borne out in a remark to a friend made at the close of this trying year at the Lawrence house, as Mr. Hamilton smilingly pointed at David, deeply absorbed in his reading, at the far end of the room: "There's a boy you can bet on."

"How so?" inquired his visitor.

"If there's any mischief about, you can bet he is in it," was the whimsical reply. There was a passing suggestion of pride discernible in his clear-cut features, as his gaze lingered for a moment on the boy's face. "He has more irons in the fire, though, than he can properly keep hot," he continued, after a brief pause. "His school work sometimes suffers from it. It is fairly good, but he could do much better. He is very impatient to have the school year end; thinks it an endless time until summer vacation."

"As youth views it, Hamilton," the other added, with a touch of sadness in his voice. "At our age, time is fleeting enough. I wish we might retain the time sense of childhood."

CHAPTER IV

ROULETTE WARFIELD

TAKING our cue from Mr. Hamilton's remarks, at the close of the last chapter, bearing upon David's studies, it may well be supposed that his migratory life was more or less of a handicap in the way of securing a consistent course of schooling. At first, private schools had been the happiest solution, although, at that time, their number was small, for the flood of undesirable immigrants had not then reached its height. But the plan was not wholly satisfactory, as valuable progress was lost in shifting from school to school in the journeys from one domicile to another. As a final solution to the vexing question, Mrs. Hamilton employed a trained school-teacher; not a governess, but a regular State-of-Maine, middle-aged, tall, angular schoolmistress, who had accumulated years of experience in the grinding machinery of the public schools. This unrelent-

ing expert accompanied the family's transitions, and held to her prerogative of teaching David at the appointed hour, regardless of wheresoever they might be, stationary or en route. When in Washington, other children of neighbors, in like quandary, were added to the flock, if as few as three may be so termed.

Even at this late point in our narrative, we must hasten to explain that David and his older brothers and sisters were not the only juveniles sheltered under the protecting wing of the Hamilton family. Mrs. Hamilton, and her mother before her, enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for welcoming into their own homes all nieces and nephews, and even those of more distant kinship, who, through death or misfortune, were left desolate.

As a result of this open hospitality, the family circle was at all times enlarged beyond its natural size. But not all these charges shared in the family migrations; only one, a girl cousin of David's, Nancy Packard, accompanied them to Washington. She was a little his senior in age, yet not old enough to be out of the lemonade class. Her face was freckled, and looked like a russet apple. She believed in David as a heathen

does in his idol, and generally was not loath to descend to taking a hand in his pranks.

Thus two of the itinerant scholars are accounted for. But after the trip to Florida, a third person, of very dusky hue, was added to the number. This is how it came about:

Life on the Southern plantation had suffered remarkably little in its outward aspect because of the war of the "Sixties." To be sure, the many negroes had their freedom, but the isolation of the island was such as to leave them entirely dependent upon their old master and mistress, so their life went on with but little change. Before or after their emancipation, the blacks had been kindly treated. Their families had waxed large, and contentment reigned.

An old house-servant named Warfield — the mother of thirteen children, conceived a great liking for Mrs. Hamilton during her stay, leading, one day, to the rather embarrassing proposal that the latter should take one of the Warfield brood back North into the Hamilton household; to be a "handmaiden fur ma lady," as the old darkey persuasively expressed herself.

Now, bearing in mind Mrs. Hamilton's open-handed reception of less fortunate relatives into

the already large household, the rather informal adoption thus proposed seemed a trifle unwelcome, and so she demurred. But the old negress was persistent.

"'Deed, Missus, I longs fur you to take de chile; she am goin' on leben year ole, an' 'll be a heap better servant dan any ob dem wu'thless mainland niggers."

In vain did Mrs. Hamilton urge that it was not her intention to take back any of the other's race with her. Then the reason for this desired separation came out.

"I reckon you believes in bad luck, don't you, Missus?"

Unfortunately, Mrs. Hamilton carelessly nodded an affirmative.

"Co'se you does," the old woman went on. "There's a pow'ful lot ob bad luck in thirteen, an' ebber since mah last baby come 'long 'an made thirteen chillun, dere ain't ben no kind ob luck for dis yere nigger, an' I jes spec' dat if I can get rid ob one ob 'em, dat'll drive de ebil one off. Yes indeedy! I sure does, Honey!"

This was a remarkably convincing argument. Suppressing, with a sensation of choking, her desire to burst into laughter, Mrs. Hamilton stated

that she would consider the matter, and so very expeditiously dismissed this mother to whom her last born had proved such an evil omen.

Nevertheless, the privileged old house-servant had her way. After the close of the morning service in the little vine-covered church, the last Sunday of Mrs. Hamilton's stay on the island, the old negress, with her numerous brood gathered about her in a semicircle, went through a most solemn and formal presentation of "Roulette" Warfield, aged eleven, to her future protectress. The ceremony was one of the mother's own contriving, and consisted of many grotesque gestures and much incomprehensible mummery.

About a dozen years earlier, when the latter had served in the capacity of waitress at the great manor-house, there were two young scions of the household who were suspected of too great a fondness for casting their lots with the Goddess of Chance. This dissipation led to numerous visits with friends of like inclination, where the fickle lady of fortune could be more conveniently wooed, and by return visits on the part of these same hospitable friends. At such times, it was but natural that the conversation at the table should dwell upon their riotous doings, when not

restrained by the presence of other members of the family. This was often enough, for these young gallants did not grace the regular breakfast hour with their attendance more frequently than avoidable.

Whenever the conversation could thus run along without restraint, its burden bore largely upon roulette and other devices of the gamester.

The dusky waitress in attendance, hearing "roulette" so often in the mouths of these adventurous spirits, gathered that it must be some fair lady, the winning of whose favor would be the climax of all bliss. Storing this name in her head for future use, cherishing the belief that it was borne by the most lovely of white damsels, she made practical use of it when her next girl baby put in an appearance. So "Roulette" Warfield became a reality.

With the ending of the coastwise trip North, David and his mother were again installed beneath the volcanic Lawrence roof-tree; all parties to the situation — David excepted — living in fear and trembling at the thought of what fearful eruption the day might bring upon them. Whether or not David's friends had scattered so as to

secure peace to the household was a problem yet unsolved.

In any event, the boy was set at his studies under the firm guidance of the spinster from Maine, with Roulette, of dusky features, added to the student body.

For years, the negro children on the plantation had been given the unusual benefit of a school conducted entirely at the personal expense of the owner; consequently, Mrs. Hamilton's "handmaiden" had so progressed in the fundamentals that her new mistress thought it a pity not to continue a good work so well begun. As the itinerant family life would affect Roulette equally with the other children, there was nothing to be done except to include her in their little school.

The schoolmistress — Miss Lang, by name — viewed this arrangement with some misgivings, for Roulette's addiction to mischief had already been discovered by David, and given some degree of publicity.

But more of her later — mayhap to our amusement, perchance to our sorrow. Anyhow, she immediately swore fealty to David, and, in the days to come, gave him much loyal and able as-

sistance in his manifold exploits, in spite of the fact that she occasionally fell a victim to his ingenuity.

This having been a rather serious chapter, overmuch given, we fear, to description and a needful attempt to help the reader to a better acquaintance with our characters, let us say "enough of it," and betake ourselves to matters of lighter vein, but of greater moment.

CHAPTER V

AN AFFAIR AT THE BRITISH EMBASSY

DAVID wanted a dog.

How the scheme ever passed the censorship of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence is a mooted question. Possibly, their consent to this doubtful addition to their domestic load was conceived in the thought that it might act as a counter-irritant, so to speak, furnishing David with cares sufficient to dull his interest in his former pestilential tribe — as they viewed it. But, whether or no, their permission was granted, and Mr. Hamilton somewhat reluctantly added his own.

This step having been decided upon, the problem next presented was the selection and purchase of a genteel canine. Mr. Hamilton had long entertained the theory that if a good, tough, healthy dog were wanted — one that would live until his teeth dropped out; until he should become blind and too feeble to crawl to his meals — it was only necessary to buy just a common dog; a plain dog

of the "yaller" variety. He reasoned that the finely bred kind, those with straight and long pedigrees, are apt to be delicate and in need of constant care, contracting all diseases to which dog flesh is heir, with the insurance risk in favor of an early death. Recognizing David's partiality for animals, and realizing that he would probably become greatly attached to any dog particularly his own property, it seemed desirable to guard, in this instance, against early demise.

With these principles in mind, he decided to buy a so-called "yaller dog." David insisted upon taking the quest into his own hands, and succeeded more to his than to the satisfaction of his father. In fact, a stable-keeper offered a great bargain — the Lawrences soon believed it to have been the worst possible bargain under Heaven — for the trivial price of one dollar. The trade was quickly concluded, and David proudly led home a dog, which, we surmise, the owner parted from without undue sorrow. This prodigy looked like a cross between a Rhode Island rooster and a barnyard mongrel; he had the legs and color of a fox terrier supporting the body of a mastiff. Whenever spoken to, he wriggled like a snake, while, during puppyhood, each sudden movement

of his fat body was prone to upset his slender Hepplewhite legs.

But this is not all; the animal answered to the name of "Alfred." Can one imagine a dog so christened? At the moment, Alfred Tennyson is the only man of prominence bearing this Christian appellation whose personality impresses itself upon us. Yet the likeness seems extremely remote, however distinguished our Alfred was destined to become.

Then, again, Alfred Tennyson wrote poetry, and it would be the veriest pulings of affectation to give such a name to the "blank" verse emitted by this beast upon a moonlight night.

The day following this masterful selection of his four-footed friend, David encountered Sinker, and exultantly broke out, "Come on over an' see my unswapable dog!"

"Reckon it's sumpthin' lemony," sniffed Sinker, with a remarkable degree of truth.

"Shucks! yer ain't seen him," retorted his friend, a trifle nettled.

"Well, come on then; let's have a peep at th' speedy pup!"

Arrived at what Sinker facetiously called the "Hamilton Kennels," David proudly exhibited

his bargain, while the other judged with a critical eye, as he finally admitted, "Not so bad! What's th' brute's name?"

"Alfred," was the rather hesitating answer.

"Al — what?" was the astonished query.

"Al — fred," David returned a bit stiffly.

"O slush!" exploded his companion. "Alfred for a dog's name! Lissen ter it! Any one that'd wish such a name as that on a pup don't know enough ter pound wet sand inter a rat-hole." He had picked up this expression from his father, who used it on every occasion to express his conception of the nethermost depths of ignorance.

"Well, I didn't name him; he had it 'fore I got him. Anyhow, it's good enough fer me," stoutly maintained his owner.

"Well, you aren't th' whole cheese," declared Sinker. "Aren't we all goin' ter play with that pup?"

"No, yer aren't!" snapped David, posting himself in a resentful attitude. "An' I jes' tell yer now, Mark Peacham, with my own mouth, yer can't be so bossy!"

"Oh, hush up! I didn't mean nuffin," Sinker hastened to reply, in a conciliatory tone. "He

aren't so bad, if they hadn't made such a sad mess of his name. Say, I heard yo' father tell mine last night that yer'd got a dog an' picked it out all by yo'self. Said he guessed yer 'herited his knowledge of dogs! Then he laughed. What d'jer 'spose he did that fer?"

"I dunno. But that's jes' it; for if any one's bright, they always 'herit it, never get any credit themselves!" pronounced David, with a look of supreme disgust. "Say," he went on, "where's The Runt? I haven't seen him since I got back?"

"Oh! he's over playin' with Hick Hunt," Sinker replied, with great contempt plainly discernible in his manner. "He don't like ter play over there 'cept when Hick has ice-cream, an' they're havin' it ter-day. I don't like their kind, anyhow; it ain't gooey enough fer me."

Suddenly, David — all the time this learned interchange of thoughts had been going on, the two boys had been making friends with the receptive pup — hurriedly straightened himself up, with the exclamation, "Gosh! I fergot. Mother couldn't find that useless coon, an' so gave me a note ter take over ter th' British Minister's. Come 'long, an' give me th' helpin' hand. We

might see that boob kid of his, an' get him ter say 'I fawncy' an' some more of his 'blawsted' drool."

Thus enticed, Sinker went along. The Embassy was carefully stalked in their hope of suddenly jumping at the English youth, and, as David expressed it, "scaring him inter a sudden rush of words to th' mouth," but without success. The door-bell being properly manipulated, they were soon conducted within by a most dignified servitor in tight-fitting uniform, and left to their own devices in the large hall, while the impressive functionary went to deliver the note. This was an invitation that needed no answer through the medium of David, and this he well knew, but the hope of encountering the English youth caused our two friends to "guess perhaps there might be an answer" to the servant's inquiry to that effect.

This time, they were not disappointed, because their looked-for prey came running in before the domestic was fairly out of sight. The lad stopped abruptly upon catching sight of the visitors. Then, with a touch of sarcasm, asked, "Oh, I say, does that bally cur tied to the fence belong to you chaps?"

"Yes! an' he ain't any cur either, you bonehead!" retorted David, in some heat at such a lack of appreciation of Alfred's good points.

"Aw, I fawncied he did. Where'd you get such a rotter?" the other inquired, his voice and face expressing only too clearly his disgust at the mongrel type exhibited in front of his home.

"Aw, I fawncy you never saw a good dawg before," returned Sinker, exaggerating the drawl of the other in his laughable imitation.

"Aw, I say now! Don't I though! We've got hundreds of thoroughbreds at home. My word! we wouldn't use such a lopsided bunch of bones as that for rat-bait," was the spirited retort.

"Don't yer call my dog rat-bait, yer half-baked Dago!"

This term, which David applied indiscriminately to all foreigners, apparently enraged the English boy, for, with a cry of anger, he rushed at David, and slapped him loudly on the cheek, with the admonition, "I'll teach you to call me a Dago, you cad!"

Our hero would have chosen a more suitable arena for an affair of honor like this, but the insults had been accumulative, having now gone

beyond what any self-respecting young American could be expected to pass peaceably over; hence the die was cast. The argument was brief and decisive. The lads were about evenly matched in height, weight, and age. David went at it like a whirlwind, raining his blows like a battering ram, until the other, for sheer protection, rushed in and tried to throttle his opponent. To this sudden attack, David replied by grasping his enemy's head, and forcing him towards the front door, smashing his victim against it with tremendous energy.

Partly on account of the dimly lighted hall, and partly because of his excitement and anger, David had not taken in the fact that the door was filled in, nearly to the floor, with elaborately frosted glass. It mattered little now, however. Through this frail barrier they both plunged, amidst a clatter and racket that quickly brought them to their senses, and, likewise, to an immediate declaration of peace.

Fortunately, neither suffered more than a few trifling scratches from the breaking glass, and still more fortunate for David, the flunkey, although not sufficiently quick to effectively interfere, was a witness of enough of the fray to

testify that David had not led in the attack. David and Sinker, knowing naught of this chance to prove an alibi, fled the gloom of the inhospitable place on the double-quick, jerking Alfred along in frantic haste.

"What yer goin' ter do 'bout it, Dave?" came in gasps from Sinker, as they fled along.

"Guess I'm sure in fer it, anyway," panted his friend. "I've a hunch I'll get off a dern sight easier if I tell first."

In a few moments, they were safely concealed — dog and boys — under the kitchen steps of the Lawrence house.

"Have a smoke?" David inquired, as from a pocket supply he broke off a piece of rattan and proffered it to Sinker.

One of the commodious clothes-hampers made of this material had long been slowly disintegrating, partly to the mystification of Mrs. Lawrence, who, suspecting rats, had tried various and sundry preventives — traps, poisons, and what not — all to no avail.

"Sure thing! Don't mind if I do," approved Sinker, with a companionable grin. "Say!" he went on, after endangering his face by a joint attempt at a light from their single match, "that

kid gives me a pain in th' neck; he thinks he's th' whole cheese. He certainly got his all right that time, though, an' I'm right glad! You sure gave him a few, Dave!"

The latter was in no wise unappreciative of this whole-hearted praise from his partner in crime, but a feeling that the quicker he made his confession the better for his bodily salvation was crowding out all other thoughts. Consequently, he made this fact clear to Sinker; then, with dragging tread, fearsomely went to seek his mother, having first, with a view to conserving the dwindling supply, moistened the lighted end of his smoldering rattan, and carefully placed it in his pocket.

Upon finding her alone, he silently closed the door, and then stood in an embarrassed attitude, shifting from one foot to the other — a certain token, to his now suspicious parent, that something had gone amiss. She glanced at him expectantly, but held her peace. Finally:

"Lissen, Mother!"

"What is it, David?"

"We'd better be packin' up an' goin' home; there's goin' ter be a war with England," he nervously replied.

"What do you mean, David?" was the startled inquiry, believing he had picked up some diplomatic gossip on his late errand.

"Well," he resumed, "Father said once that if any one damaged th' house of a foreign minister it would be some kind of a stomach-ache, an' I asked him what it meant, an' he said it was Latin fer some one's knocking a chip off their shoulder an' might lead ter war."

"*Casus belli?*" investigated Mrs. Hamilton, retaining her gravity with perceptible difficulty.

"Yes! I guess that's th' dope."

"The what?"

Although David's mother had an old-time aversion to slang, by a casual transgression upon her own part, she had long since lost all influence in restraining her son in that direction. When checking a tremendous burst of slang, she had once exclaimed, "David, I must really insist upon your 'cutting out' such language."

A keen glance of scrutiny from her youngest, at that time, warned her that she had defeated her purpose.

"I mean that's what Father called it," corrected David.

"But, David," his mother persisted, "what

has happened, under the protecting flag of England, to make you think we're going to war with her?"

Then came the outpouring.

In silent horror she listened to an unburdening of conscience that filled her with measureless mortification. It was a slow and begrudging process. David offered little defense, except that the other had picked the quarrel, and he well knew that such a fact would count but little when weighed in the scales against such a gross fall from grace as engaging in a battle under the flag of an accredited representative of a great friendly power.

Without comment — this sort of silent reproof worked more on David's apprehensive feelings than actual punishment, for he could never tell what it portended — she sadly seated herself at her writing desk, and wrote another note.

"David!"

"Yes, Mother. Anythin' I can do fer you?"

His mother eyed him speculatively as she crisply commanded, "David, you take this note at once to the British Embassy, and when that boy's mother sends you word that she will see you, I want you to make her the best apology

you know how! And, mind now, it is to be a very proper and polite one! Don't you dare to put the blame on any one else! Then you come back to me! I shall have some plans for you."

This was gall and wormwood to David. The prospect of his mother's further schemes for his discomfiture were as nothing beside this sickening ordeal. He fully expected "that dern kid," his late antagonist, "ter be hanging on th' side-lines an' tickled ter pieces," as he expressed it to Sinker, who eagerly awaited him below, and now, in a flurry of expectancy, accompanied him on his way.

Upon arriving at their destination, the view of the unsightly boards, used to close up the disfiguring gap made by their recent rapid exit, did not lend any solace to the painful occasion.

David did his best. The wife of the British Minister listened with an expressionless face to the boy's heartburning stammers of apology. The "dern kid" did stand on the "side-lines" and gape at the culprit. Truly, David's cup was sipped to the dregs.

Then, suddenly, with a contagious, endearing laugh, the imposing lady threw her arms around the neck of the astonished David, and kissed him

again and again, while saying, "You poor little dear, your mother is too hard on you! It was no more your fault than my own boy's, and, I fancy, not so much. He should have treated his guests with greater politeness! But perhaps you will be better friends after this. I want him to know American boys and make friends with them. Come now, make up!"

They did, shyly at first, but ultimately it was well done.

Then there were tempting things to eat, the kind that go with an English afternoon tea. Sinker was called in, and made one of the party. Altogether, a happy occasion!

"Well if that isn't th' doggonedest!" observed Sinker on their homeward path.

"I'll be derned!" corroborated David.

CHAPTER VI

ALFRED'S LONELY EVENING

By the time David had been in the joyous possession of his dollar bargain for about a week, the two had become as thick as thieves. This intimacy would undoubtedly have furnished a fair basis for the realization of the counter-irritant plan had it not been that the coming of Alfred was loudly heralded, far and wide, among David's old crowd. Forthwith, they came to see; they admired, and came again. The cure bade fair to be hoist with its own petard.

The dog had now become so devoted to his master that he fell into miserable despondency when left to his own devices; these being of a nature likely to depreciate local real estate values. As a doubtful expedient, and in the interest of peaceful nights, David, greatly to his relish, was advised by the Lawrences to share the comforts of his own room with his pet. This move was finally decided upon by those good people quite

in self-defense, otherwise the dog made life hideous as he yowled out his loneliness and discontent well through the dwindling hours of the darksome nights.

A few evenings after this arrangement had gone into effect, the Hamilton family, the youngest included, went to the theater. The reason of the latter's having been allowed this unusual dissipation need not concern us; it suffices, for our purpose, that he went.

Before setting out, he carefully secured Alfred in their joint domicile, looking earnestly to his comfort and well-being. With a final pat and a companionable "Good-by, ole fellow," he closed the door, hastily joined the family party waiting at the carriage, and was quickly driven away. In the pleasant moments of happy anticipation, the dog was soon forgotten.

Not so, however, by those at home. Scarcely had the last sounds of the beating hoofs and rolling wheels died into silence than a turmoil began.

It is fair to assume that the puppy's mighty intellect enabled him to reason that his roommate's absence would be of but short duration, as had often been the case before, so that the

deserted one sat with head cocked on one side, wistfully gazing at the closed door, momentarily expecting it to open and restore his patron. It is proper also to assume that the canine's reasoning powers soon impressed him with the idea that the duration of the customary absence had been unduly prolonged. But not being quite sure upon this point, he did not feel warranted in proclaiming the fact too loudly, so, at first, merely made a few staccato remarks, only in a trifling way bearing upon David's threatened breach of friendship — just a hint, as one might say, that anything resembling an evening alone at home would not be tolerated. Nothing coming of this — so far as he could observe — his head listed over to port — we are sure that the first list was to starboard — and he uttered a succession of loud remarks of great similarity, and decidedly uncomplimentary to David.

Then he rested a moment, as was entirely fitting, to give the slandered one a chance to return to favor. But this thoughtful and whole-souled condescension on Alfred's part being equally barren of results, he let his collar out another hole, squared himself on all fours — no list this time — threw his head well back that his

lungs might have full play, and told the whole household what he thought of it. Undoubtedly, he now reasoned — and quite properly so — that if his remarks were sufficiently loud and long continued, there would be a good chance of his complaint reaching his master's ears, with whom now all friendly relations should be forever shattered. On the theory of chance, there was something in this. We once heard of a woman who, when she felt a cold coming on, took four different medicines on the theory that if one failed another might succeed. By a similar line of reasoning, we infer that if Alfred had been allowed to continue his refrain until well towards the midnight hour, his prayer— not according to our understanding of the golden rule, if one may judge by its tone — stood an excellent chance of being heard by the person to whom it was so vociferously addressed.

That was not the way of it, however; the other desperate denizens of the house thought otherwise.

After a ten or fifteen minute flood of this kind of canine billingsgate had issued from David's room, Mrs. Lawrence impatiently laid down her book and cuttingly remarked, "William, you

know I was very doubtful all the time about this dog proposition, and never should have allowed you to — there, just listen to that! What will the neighbors think? For Heaven's sake, run up and close all the windows!"

"Yes, dear," her husband submissively returned, and did as he was bidden.

Mrs. Lawrence rather absently returned to her reading. Then the voluminous melody ceased, shortly followed by the sounds of scampering feet. In characteristic, fickle, puppy spirit, Alfred cavorted joyfully about Mr. Lawrence's legs, winding the leash about them to his great bodily danger, as they came down the stairs together.

"What are you doing with that puppy?" demanded his wife.

"He is only lonesome; just wants a little human society, and so I've brought him down here," Mr. Lawrence responded, a trifle sheepishly. "He will be all right with us, and not bark any more."

"Yes, but you are tired, and knew we were going to bed early to-night; we can't sit up till that pesky boy comes home. You must be careful of your health, my dear!"

In order to provide the Hamiltons with the

rather commodious apartments that they required, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence had given up the entire second story for their accommodation. To this end, they had improvised a sleeping-room for themselves on the first floor, leading directly off the large entrance hall.

The vacillating nature, incident to giddy young things like Alfred, stood his unwilling guardians in good stead at this trying period. A saucer of milk, an occasional pat and kind word, kept him within the bounds of quiet, although there were moments when he hovered on the borderline of again giving vent to the musical strains of his lonesome plaints.

At the seemly hour of ten, Mrs. Lawrence peremptorily sounded taps. Dog and all, they prepared for bed. Mrs. Lawrence, always needlessly hugging the notion that her husband was in frail health, had devised what seemed a workable plan to permit him to secure his usual sleep, while also preserving peace and quiet. She undressed, slipped Alfred's leash over her wrist, and retired. The door into the hall, to which she was the nearer, was left ajar, providing a means for silently letting the animal out the instant she detected David's return, all with a solicitous intent

to avoid disturbing her husband. He, if the truth were known, was a very good sleeper, and one whose own nasal contributions to the musical art ordinarily defied interruption. In our humble judgment, he might have disputed any preeminence along those lines.

In spite of Mr. Lawrence's protests and misgivings, this plan appeared to work very satisfactorily. After a few hereditary, wolf-like circlings, Alfred crashed down the imaginary long grass of the prairie, and sank to rest; well earned, if his earlier exercises may be considered as fit preparation.

Ere long, his jailer, finding everything serene, fell into a fitful slumber, and all was quiet, if no mention be made of Mr. Lawrence's nasal strains.

Eleven-thirty! Distant sounds of beating hoofs; a carriage stopping at the curb. Alfred stirred uneasily. The front door gave to the turn of a night-key; the prisoner rose to his feet and sniffed; all was now forgiveness in the mind of this capricious one. He wagged his tail, and wriggled his awkward body in an ecstasy of delight. He heard a familiar voice; then was off like a shot to the end of his tether. The jolt was sudden and vigorous. Mrs. Lawrence, in half-

wakened bewilderment, slid off the bed to her feet, and was towed after. At the door, there flashed into her mind a most luminous grasp of affairs. Her right arm was so extended in its hitch to the tow-line as to be helpless in her now frantic efforts at bodily concealment. With her free hand, she clutched convulsively, but uselessly, at the swaying door, and then — farewell to all modesty!

But just a word, if you please; there are a few details of costume and the like desirable to our full appreciation of this feminine apparition.

A link of Alfred's leash, caught in the lower back edge of her nightly apparel, had lifted the rear of the garment in such a fashion as to make a woefully narrow skirt at the front, drawn in high at the knees. The effect was to display a pair of slender calves, while their owner tottered with restricted steps, fraught with the constant thought of plunging headlong at the feet of the astonished assembly in the hall. It now included Senator Peacham, who had dropped in for an after-theater cigar with his colleague. Into the former's unwilling arms, this scantily clad martyr was violently precipitated by the entangled leash, taut under Alfred's wriggling weight.

"Let me go from the nasty beast!" she quivered, while, in agonized modesty, she plucked at the hem of her garment to lessen her exposure.

David let out a yell of delight, as he beheld the rapidly developing situation, and irrepressibly shouted, "Look at th' back-row chorus girl!"

At this critical moment, David was swept up the stairs by his suffocating and hysterical mother, while Mr. Hamilton hastened to turn off the lights, the better to negotiate a treaty of peace without their lime-light assistance.

"Say," David confided to the innocent author of all this scandalous business, when they had reached the seclusion of their own retreat, "I wish Sinker 'ud been there; I'll bet he'd passed away! Wa'n't she th' sportiest guy on earth? They will be bright an' early on th' job for little you an' me in th' sorrowful mornin'! Don't yer care, it's worth it!"

CHAPTER VII

AN ADVENTURE AT THE CAPITOL

"THE thing ain't doable, Dave."

"Oh, you kid, Sinker. Sure 'tis! We'll get a lot of willin' workers, an' put it all over them boobs of cops down there in th' Capitol."

"Jes' th' same, Dave, I don't catch on ter how you're goin' ter get by with th' thing. It's a blamed long climb up th' dome, an' there'll sure be some guy rubbering out some place, that we'll have ter watch out fer," Sinker doubtfully persisted.

"Naw, ther' won't! Everybody'll be so nutty on watchin' th' big procession that they won't have any time ter see us!" Dave reassured him.

At this juncture in their argument they arrived at Sinker's back yard fence, where the latter slipped through a broken part, while David climbed over as he significantly repeated:

> "If you go over, you smell like clover;
> If you go under, you smell like thunder;
> If you go through, you smell like glue."

The innuendo in the last line was completely ignored by the one who went through, for he immediately rattled on, "Well, say they don't, where we goin' ter get th' clothes?"

"O shucks! I got 'em all right; that's what made me get wise ter th' scheme in th' beginning. Mother's put an old suit of Dad's out in th' kitchen fer 'em ter give ter th' first 'zerving man that comes 'long; guess I'm 'zerving as any one. We'll just annex 'em when nobody's round."

"We sure nuff gotter have a hat," Sinker pursued, determined to probe matters to the bottom; "that's one of th' needablest things."

"Well, can't yer dig up that much?" was the arch-schemer's sharp query.

Sinker pondered an instant before replying. "Ah-ha, I reckon so; there's some old ones in th' attic."

"All right, then," David went on to explain, "you have it here in th' stable to-morrow after school, an' tell all th' rest of th' bunch ter be down in th' coal-tunnel at three o'clock, an' th' thing's a go."

"All right, I'm on," his companion grinned, his skepticism fleeing before David's reassuring arguments.

The next afternoon, at the appointed hour and place, the two plotters were joined by Candy Bob, The Runt, and two other eager conspirators, well primed for the undertaking. The trysting-place was a dark and grimy tunnel leading from the subterranean depths of the old Capitol some distance out under the East grounds to an iron-covered coal-chute. Through this concealed passageway the hungry boilers received their supplies of fuel. A dark and dismal region withal! One not known to any great number of Washington boys, in those days.

Sinker or David demanded the pass-word from each arrival as he groped his dingy way along the tunnel to the agreed spot. When David had called the roll, in sepulchral whispers, and found all accounted for, he began to give his instructions. Each was allotted a hat, a coat, a pair of trousers, or some other article, which he was to hide as best he could beneath his own garments. With all their ingenuity, however, there was no way by which they could wholly conceal a paper-covered bundle of ample size; this fell to David.

Assuring himself that all were in readiness, their leader whistled softly in order to gather the clan about him; then with a "Come on, fellers!"

he led the way to the cheerless chamber beneath the rotunda of the great structure. Here these nimble-witted rascals again rallied for a last word of caution from their leader:

"Now, you kids, one of yer follow Sinker an' me in 'bout a minute, an' then another in 'bout 'nother minute, 'till you're all come. Don't hurry; kind of stroll 'long, one at a time, 'sif you're sight-seeing. See! We'll wait at th' top 'til yer all get there." Then, after a momentary pause, he added impressively, "Say, guess nobody better start 'til Sinker an' I get up in th' rotunda, an' if there's a cop 'round, I'll stamp twice as we go cross th' center stone, an' if there aren't any, I'll stamp just once. You can hear it here. Do yer get me?"

"Course we do. What kind of mutts do yer take us for?" fumed Candy Bob, who was dancing with impatience to be off.

"Come on, Sinker," was David's only reply.

At the expected moment, a reverberating sound rumbled through the chamber signifying that all was safe.

"I boney ter go next," fidgeted Candy Bob.

"Go on then!" a calmer voice retorted. "If yer don't quit gettin' so rattled, you'll get swiped."

One at a time, they followed along; cautiously peering around huge columns; flashing by a window; and so up the hundreds of curving stairs circling heavenward around the big rotunda. Candy Bob, in one of his sudden rushes from cover to cover, flung himself head-first against a woman of such generous portliness that one marveled greatly how she ever reached so rare an altitude. This sight-seer, who chanced, at the time, to be traversing a shadowed place on the stairs, had been unobserved by the impetuous boy.

"Gosh!" he exploded. "Do yer want th' earth?" quite oblivious of the fact that he was scrambling for a sizable portion himself.

The victim of his catapult-like action was now sitting shut up like a jack-knife on the iron steps, gasping for breath. Between times, she was giving full play to shrieks unmistakably denoting feminine terror. Her unwitting assailant waited only to gather the dismal impression that he had put their whole plot in jeopardy and then fled on.

"Oh! Oh! what was it?" she groaned, giving vent to a prolonged low sobbing, still crushed to earth in the semi-darkness where misfortune had first overtaken her.

Another catapult! This time, The Runt, in

one of his forced marches, had tripped on her feet, and sprawled completely over her palpitating form.

He could scarcely discern anything in the nocturnal obscurity, but a terrifying clamor sent him flying frantically upwards.

Another of the schemers, closely pressing on the heels of The Runt, hearing the peculiar pulsating sound in the somber stairway, checked his ascending career long enough to accustom his vision to the murkiness. Finding the neighborhood unwholesome, he stealthily prepared to creep past the hysterical female. He was just then joined by Hickory Hunt, the last of the crew, who hoarsely interrogated the former as to the trouble.

"Sh! don't know," whispered the first boy, "Let's skin 'long by th' wall!"

The plan was adopted in hot-headed haste. With the impelling power induced by fear of the police, their necks itching from thoughts of the hardy hand of the law, they set such a rapid gait up the rattling old iron stairs as the historic dome had doubtless never experienced.

As the last of the recruits breathlessly spurted into the midst of those who had gone before, dismay was clearly visible upon the faces of all, in-

cluding David, although he had no intention of letting his companions discover the fact. The first two who had passed this disconcerting gauntlet had hastily related their experiences to David and Sinker, so all were posted in regard to the startling events.

"What we goin' ter do, Dave?" excitedly stuttered Candy Bob, hoping their leader would, as usual, pull them through.

"Say, you fellers aren't got any more backbone than a — a — rubber hose," David sneered, bothered an instant to complete his comparison; and swaggering to hide his own confusion. "Sinker an' I saw th' ole bale of hay as we came up, an' jes' sauntered by like, an' she never 'spected anythin'! You raw kids sure are 'nough ter mess up —"

"That don't make any diff now, Dave," Sinker cut in. "Hush up, an' tell us what we're goin' ter do when th' police hear her! Hick says she was hollering like a smacked baby when he came by."

"Ther' won't be any cops! You bet yer neck they're all out watchin' th' show. Anyhow, jes' lissen ter th' bands! How do yer 'spose her boohooin' is ever goin' ter get by all that racket?"

The others had been so fairly upset in both minds and bodies that none had heard the sound of martial strains rising from below until it was thus called to their attention. Signs of returning calm were now revealing themselves. Still the irrepressible Candy Bob, but half convinced, demanded, as he wriggled about, "Aren't we gotter get by her when we go down? An' won't we be breakin' some track records as we—?"

"Oh, quit yo' drool, Sweetie," Sinker cut in. "Don't we know she's there, if she is, an' can't we get by her? She ain't so pow'ful big as ter block th' whole road!"

Thus admonished, the apprehensive youngster subsided; that is to say, in speech, but his eyes stuck out like electric headlights, and his wriggling and excitability continued to be noticeable.

In the meantime, David and Sinker proceeded with the real business of the day. They untied the parcel, and disclosed a bundle of straw; from their friends they next collected the contraband goods. Hickory was sent back down the stairs, some fifty or so, to do sentry duty, and the fifth boy, whose name is unimportant, on a like mission to the gallery circling the top of the rotunda. To Candy Bob, who made as if to ac-

company the last, "You stay here, yer rattle-headed infant, where we can watch yer!"

The idea of posting a lookout in the gallery found its origin in a wish to observe anything suggestive of a commotion on the floor of the rotunda, some hundreds of feet lower down, growing out of their mix-up on the stairs.

The work now went rapidly forward. With the aid of many pins and much string, and haste born of the nervous qualms of the guilty, their smuggled garments soon covered the nakedness of the straw, and presented a fairly good representation of an aristocratic scarecrow. The pockets were filled with small stones to give weight, while the whole was topped off with a hat of late design, purloined from Sinker's father, for the hats in his attic had proved to be a myth.

When the handiwork was done, the deception was a creditable one.

Down on the great asphalt plain, at the East front of the Capitol, were countless thousands of human beings — men, women, and children; government officials and police; naval and military bodies, the latter now drawn up at attention. The beating drums and brass instruments had

lapsed into quiet, a great man was launching forth into a patriotic speech. David crept to the edge and looked over. Gazing a moment at the pigmies below, he exultantly whispered, "All right, fellers, now's th' time, let him go!"

The form of a man lurched forward over the rail; blood-curdling cries of "Help! Help! Murder!" reached the multitude on the blistering asphalt.

Thousands of eyes were cast upwards. Women screamed and fainted, as in hideous dread they beheld the living flesh shoot head first, and then, with a sickening thud, plunge on to the roof at one side of the dome.

It was with difficulty that order was retained among the packed and sweltering masses; the soldiers were hastily requisitioned for police duty. "Give her air! Give her air!" "Water! Water!" and other mixtures of orders and supplications arose. Lanes were forcibly opened, here and there, by the soldiery so as to permit aid to reach the stricken ones. The "great man" had become a memory of the past.

After much delay, some police officers, with customary alertness, bethought themselves of the mangled body upon the roof. With belated en-

ergy they tugged their Apollo-like bodies up to the scene of the catastrophe. They failed to observe six little figures scuttling, with breathless haste, through the Senate exit of the rotunda as they officiously passed in at the entrance.

"Any feller got a match?" David asked, about two minutes later, down in the pitchy gloom of the coal-tunnel, as he drew once more upon his supply of rattan. "Here, you-all, have a smoke?"

"Don't mind if I do," replied Sinker.

CHAPTER VIII

SENATOR PEACHAM TO THE RESCUE

"GEE!" ejaculated Sinker. "That kid yer bumped through th' front door down ter th' Embassy must have more money'n a plumber!"

David lifted his eyes quizzically as he finished sticking down the end of the paper receptacle which he had deftly shaped over a lead-pencil.

Sinker, in turn, took the result of the other's craft, and proceeded to tamp it full of hay-seed, as he explained, "Th' blamed snob went round droppin' pennies down our necks yesterday — real good pennies; not spitballs or sumpthin' of that kind. I made out it tickled me terrible so he got after me th' most. I got seven down my neck."

"Say, yer did make a haul! 'Spose he'd do it some more?" inquired David, as he viewed his fellow worker with a rapt and admiring gaze.

"Reckon he might," Sinker allowed, seeing where the other was drifting. "But he's so dog-

gone stuck up I hate ter let him think he's got anythin' on me."

"I don't hanker after his society any more'n you do, but I could swallow a blamed lot of pride if he wants ter drop coin down my — Say, how'd yer get 'em out?"

"Jes' stood on my head when I got home an' kicked my toes 'gainst th' house. I got 'em sure nuff," was the laughing response.

For a brief period, work in the cigar factory went on with steady purpose, while the pile of finished product grew apace. Suddenly, Sinker, who had been intently examining one of the cases, burst out, "Look here, Dave! where'n time did yer get that stuff you're using fer wrappers?"

The other gave a somewhat ambiguous smile, as he carelessly responded "Oh, I couldn't find any scissors ter cut paper th' right size, an' jes happened ter run across that Bible they gave me at Sunday School, Christmas time."

"Well, what of it, I don't see how that helped any?"

"Well, it did," resumed David, with a wicked little grin. "Th' leaves were jes' th' right size, an' didn't need any cuttin'! I jes' pulled out th' whole book of Psalms."

Sinker gazed with frank and flattering interest as he approved "Humph, you'll do!"

Just then, David tiptoed to the window, with the guarded warning, "Don't make any noise; there goes ole Ben Lynch!"

Sinker, who knew that the irascible old man could be easily annoyed and would take grim pleasure in soundly caning them, if so he got the chance, waited in glee the outcome of his companion's attack!

> "Amen: Brother Ben
> Shot a crow and hit a hen!"

hurtled through the open window.

Old Ben stopped and testily gazed about him, with angry suspicion resting on the open window. The boys ran to cover in the hay, while the old man, shaking his uplifted cane, and muttering to himself, plodded onward, leaving his tormentors to come out of their seclusion at leisure.

Again silence reigned unbroken, for a season, otherwise than by the busy little sounds incident to the conversion of the Old Testament wrappers and hay-seed fillers into fragrant Havanas. At last, Sinker uttered a prolonged chuckle, which drew forth the query:

"What's eatin' yer?"

"Nothin' much," mysteriously laughed Sinker, "only I didn't go ter school to-day."

"Yes, you didn't!"

"Honest, Dave!"

"Sick?" David ventured, as he smiled incredulously.

"Nope, but you're gettin' warm. There's a boy over at our school — one of them twins I was tellin' yer 'bout. Well, one of 'em's got th' measles. So jes' 'fore school this mornin', I told Mother that Skinny Jim had th' measles, an' one of th' twins had th' measles, an' Mr. Perkins's little boy'd got 'em. Mother, she reckoned there was a regular 'demic of 'em, an' wouldn't lemme go ter school, though I tried orful."

"Well, you chump, why didn't yer keep still an' go an' catch 'em. I was 'sposed jes' long 'nough ago ter come down with 'em to-day, an' been carrying my lucky-stone round so's I would sure get 'em an' not have ter go ter school. An' I've seen th' new moon over my right shoulder, too. Ortter be some luck in all that!"

"I don't believe in any new-moon luck," was the discouraging rejoinder. "Can't be any luck in anything that looks like what yer clip off yo'

finger nails when yer have ter cut 'em. Anyhow, there ain't any 'demic down ter our school, yer goat!" in a tone brimming over with contempt at the other's lack of comprehension. "Skinny Jim is one of th' twins, an' ain't his name Perkins?"

"Oh!" snickered David, in huge delight. "Only one case! I'm on!"

"So was mother 'fore noontime," was the reminiscent observation.

"Soon as we get this hay-seed used up, let's go an' try ter get some more pennies down our necks," David proposed. "If we'd get three more, we could get a couple of drinks down at th' drug store; I don't boney ter drink any more of that lemonade we've made fer th' store."

Although Sinker took this partnership division of his own seven cents as a matter of course, he held to his aversion towards the English boy with much tenacity, for he maintained "Naw, let's not! I can't stan' his Lordship any more yet awhile; he's a regular snob! Besides, he's too dinged clothy!" Then, after a pause, as he took a handful of wrappers from that department of the factory, "Say! ain't he got th' name though. Lancelot Reginald Percy — an', gorry! I don't

know what all! It's so long he can't get ink enough on ter write it with one dip of th' pen."

At this juncture, a half-grown kitten came running by, choking and spitting as if on the verge of final dissolution. As it belonged to Sinker — his stable being the scene of their industry — he gave chase, and soon brought it back for examination. A piece of pink string, of the drug-store variety, protruded from the kitten's mouth. This was evidently the cause of the disturbance. Sinker held the animal between his hands, while David proceeded carefully to pull on the offending piece of twine. Slowly, at first; he began to pull faster as the inches turned into feet and the feet into yards. "Gosh! she's unraveling!" was his astonished comment, as at least a dozen feet of string was extracted, with no end in sight. A few more yards saw the end however, and the kitten was soon purring herself to sleep between the knees of her relieved owner.

After another short interval of industrious work the raw material gave out, so the boys moved themselves and wares out against the fence next the sidewalk, where, with various other impedimenta, they set up a stand for the display and sale of the new-made cigars, a few bags of

rather smoky pop-corn and some weak lemonade. They had restored this beverage to the desired level in the pail by the simple expedient of adding water to what had been left from the business of the day before.

A sign calling attention to the unusual opportunity to refresh one's thirst, satisfy the appetite, and end off with a grateful smoke, had been thoughtfully and prayerfully inked on to a large piece of cardboard. It also conveyed the enticing snare to the unwary:

"FUDGE AT TIMES."

But the time had not arrived.

After an hour or so of lagging business, consisting chiefly of beguiling a few boys into stocking up with some of the "best smokes," something happened. Without warning, the entire stock-in-trade was sent flying to the four winds.

David's "thoroughbred mongrel" up to that instant had been calmly reposing beneath the shaky counter, trustfully secured, as was supposed, to one of its legs.

In the next house to Sinker, there lived Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, a nervous and excitable middle-

aged couple. Their one pleasure in life consisted in fondly caring for a diminutive French poodle, clipped topiary fashion. Every afternoon — if the weather were kind — they took this triumph of the hairdressers' art out for his daily exercise, when he was further disfigured by having to endure the unnatural dog costume of a woolen sweater. On one of these occasions, Mrs. Maxwell was asked, by a friendly passer-by, if the dog were a puppy.

"O dear, no!" she sadly replied. "He is ten years old. We've had him only about eight years, and we could have had him when he was a darling little puppy, and just think of all the happy times we've missed!"

Upon this particular afternoon, when the trade in hay-seed cigars was thriving to the detriment of that in weak lemonade and smoky pop-corn, the Maxwells, true to their custom, were seeing to the gentle exercise and airing of their pet poodle.

It should be understood that Alfred was not a quarrelsome dog; he was not even addicted to the use of offensive language towards his own kind. If treated with due respect, he was ready to make friends with any dog — would even overlook

lapses in pedigree. But let any dog — especially if of smaller size — encroach upon Alfred's preserves, and he would plunge into the offensive, instanter.

The beautified idol of the couple next door sniffed as he trotted round his doting owners; sniffed, and kept on sniffing.

"What is it, darling?" quavered Mrs. Maxwell.

"Yap! yap! yap!" was the intelligible retort, as he caught sight of Alfred lazily coiled under the lemonade-stand, some fifty feet away on the adjacent lawn. In a flash, this trespasser — for dogs, and above all French poodles, are not expected to define imaginary lines of proprietorship between adjoining premises — felt a pair of jaws snap ruthlessly at his back. Insulting, indeed! At Alfred's onslaught, over went the stand to the confusion of the hucksters. And homeward fled the French poodle, with Alfred rapidly trailing on in full cry.

"Oh! Oh! Help! Help! He'll kill our darling!" wailed Mrs. Maxwell.

The darling ran to cover among the copious folds of Mrs. Maxwell's skirts, while Alfred locked his teeth on to a hind leg — of the poodle.

Mr. Maxwell feebly raised his cane, and tremblingly trotted hither and yon, trying to hit the enemy, but, as the two dogs were spinning about and in and out among the good lady's legs, the task was one of no mean accomplishment. At what seemed an opportune moment, he struck out, but instead of getting his quarry, fetched his devoted and hysterical wife a glancing blow on the back of the head. She gave expression to her woe by falling in delicate anguish upon her husband's palpitating breast as her voice trembled with appeal, "Theodore, how could you?"

Theodore's eyes were wide open with horror and remorse. Two maids had now appeared, by whom the frail victim of his wrath was tenderly removed to her room.

David and Sinker, ere this, had come posthaste in quest of Alfred, whose hind legs were firmly grasped by his worried owner, while Sinker clutched the lamented poodle. Two or three tugs, in unison, separated the fighting beasts, but David, being possessed of the hind legs of his own property, and not wishing to incur the risk of another set-to, besides being doubtful as to what might happen to him if he did let go, began spinning on his heels and swinging the dog round

and round with great rapidity, relying upon the centripetal force of his action to protect himself from the animal's teeth.

"Get that four-legged dude in th' house quick!" he shouted, as he continued his breathless pirouetting.

Mr. Maxwell, grasping the situation, endeavored, with halting steps, to obey. As he tottered on to the veranda, carrying his bleeding pet, David lost his grip on the slippery pedal appendages of Alfred, whose four legs, the second he touched the ground, were already working in unison for a headlong rush after his aggressor, and together they disappeared through the entrance to the house. Mr. Maxwell, with a heroic effort, had heaved his own dog into the doorway as he beheld the other again on the rampage.

At this critical turn of affairs, Sinker's father, Senator Peacham, of old Southern family, most unhappily chanced upon the scene. He was clad in immaculate white flannel trousers and dark coat, which costume he always affected upon warm days.

Observing the excitement, and taking note that his son was a conspicuous party to the proceedings, he promptly decided that it behooved him to

proffer his own good offices towards straightening matters out. Thus he entered the Maxwell portal along with its distracted owner. Once within, they caught a glimpse of Alfred in hot pursuit of the snarling and snapping poodle as both dashed full tilt up the stairway.

The Senator followed, by dint of much exertion supporting the exhausted person of Mr. Maxwell, whom all this unhappy tumult had agitated to the point of hysteria.

Once upon the next floor, there was no difficulty in locating the fray in a near-by chamber, for the din of battle was terrific. Senator Peacham rushed into the arena, while Mr. Maxwell tremblingly posted himself without the chamber door, his cane grasped for one final death blow at the invader should he chance to come out. The Senator handled the situation with an expert hand. In a moment, the offending beasts were separated, the poodle shut fast into a closet, and the Senator hastened back to call David to secure his own dog. We have omitted to mention that the color of this prize animal was a dirty white. A most unfortunate circumstance!

Feverish Mr. Maxwell waited anxiously in the hall, beside the chamber entrance. Upon catch-

ing sight of Senator Peacham's advancing right leg, encased in white, he threw all his remaining strength into a knock-out blow, and hit the mark. He gasped in dismay at what he had wrought, and sank a helpless heap upon the rug.

With doubtful, hesitating tread, the late cigar-manufacturers had stealthily mounted part way up the stairs. At this crucial period of our tale, they were peeping through the balustrade into the room whence the smitten statesman was emerging.

"Oh! Eough! Boo — o — o —!" gulped Sinker, as he helplessly tried to smother his levity, and, so failing, slid down the stairs, rolling in convulsive merriment on the floor at their foot.

In this compromising posture, his father beheld him, as, in righteous anger — too great to be overcome by the excruciating pain in his injured shin — he stalked to the rail, and looked over. He addressed to his erring and unsympathetic son, in audible and forcible language, terms that were not of endearment.

"How's your dad's shin?" David inquired, with faint hopefulness, the next afternoon, of Sinker.

THE SENATOR HANDLED THE SITUATION WITH AN EXPERT HAND.
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"Oh, we went through a most excitish night, but he's gone down ter th' Senate now; had ter ride though; limpin' like he had a wooden leg. Say, I don't know as I'm right strong on dogs; limpin' some myself!"

"Ever own a dog; one all your truly own?" David feelingly inquired.

"Nope, an' I reckon I don't want ter, either, way I felt after Father got through with me last night."

"You'd think different if yer had one all yore own," was the pitying rejoinder. "If yer've never owned a dog, yer've never loved a dog! Yer may like dogs, but yer have ter own one ter really and truly love it!"

CHAPTER IX

TROUBLES COME THICK AND FAST

"Look, Mother!"

"Well, David, I will listen, if that is what you mean."

"Miss Lang has let Nancy drop drawin'," announced the boy, earnestly, ignoring the insinuation.

"Yes. I know she has. Nancy doesn't seem to have much ability in that line, so Miss Lang and I both thought it a waste of time for her to keep on."

"Well, there's sumpthin' I haven't got much 'bility in, an' I want ter drop it. I got ter drop sumpthin'!"

His mother looked thoughtfully at him a moment, as, with distrustful apprehension, she demanded, "What do you mean, David? What do you want to drop?"

"'Portment," he declared with conviction. "I

know I haven't any 'bility in 'portment. If yer don't believe it, yer jes' ask Miss Lang!"

"I do believe it!" she promptly declared, with a confirmatory shake of the head, biting her lips to suppress her amusement, "but we will leave that to your father!"

David eyed her suspiciously, but held his peace, somehow having an inkling that the subject had better not be pressed.

Mrs. Hamilton occasionally glanced up from her work, and viewed her son with a quaint air, ending with the query, "What are you doing there, David?"

"Writin' a story, an' there ain't goin' ter be any moral in it, either!" he avowed, with an emphatic nod.

Her face wore a comical expression, as she resumed her occupation.

"I wish yer'd lemme go ter Sinker's school," the embryo author announced, a little later.

"Why?"

"They've got lots more fellers'n we've got in ours. 'Sides, things happen; there's lots more doin'. Sinker's sister said that a girl named Celluloid —"

"You mean 'Sally Lloyd,'" his mother in-

terrupted, " and I wish you wouldn't call the little Peacham girl 'Beef-Juice'—her name is 'Beatrice.' Can't you boys have any respect for a mother's feelings?"

"I can't help it. She looks jes' like she was chock-full of beef-juice, too, she's so fat. If yer'd stick a pin in her I'll bet she'd bust; jes' like a water blister."

"Stop it, David!"

"Yes'm! Hick Hunt says she's fat enough ter kill. Anyhow, Sinker calls that other girl 'Celluloid,'" David contended. "Well, she had 'penderciteris, or sumpthin' like that, an' Beef—I mean Beatrice, said she was glad of it."

"I don't see why you think that's an attraction."

"Well, that aren't all," David wistfully rattled on. "They cut her 'pendix out an' when she got well 'nough ter come ter school she brought it in a bottle an' showed it ter every one. Aren't nobody in our school had a 'pendix cut out!"

"I certainly hope none of you ever will have!" was the unappreciative answer.

Before long, the harrowing tale of "Skeleton Gulch" was laid aside with the coaxing query, "Can't I go home, I'm gettin' sick of livin' here?"

"Of course not! Not until we all go! It will be a short session, so we are going to wait for your father. Why don't you like living here?"

"These fussy ole Lawrences make me tired; all my friends think they're nutty. They go up in th' air every time we do anythin'."

Mrs. Hamilton stirred uneasily at this combination of criticism and slang, but deemed wise to pass it over unheeded, so only remarked, "Even so, you ought to be contented with your own mother."

"Huh! Don't see much in that," was the cynical response. "Late ter breakfast! out ter lunch! company ter dinner! where do I come in?"

David was now stretched at full length, face down, on the floor, from where he consoled himself by muttering, "Thank heaven there's a Saturday in each week; I've got that ter look forward to!"

"Get up, David," his mother commanded. "It's no wonder your clothes don't last longer!"

"When yore stummick aches, ain't it a good thing to lie on it?" he asked, in an injured tone.

"David, you will be the death of me! Get right up and I will give you something that will help you."

"It won't do any good, an' it aches orful. Never'll be any better in this terrible climate!"

Mrs. Hamilton, who had hastily started in quest of restoratives, suddenly changed her mind, and returned to her work, remarking, with a sigh of resignation, "Morals are more bewildering than stomachs."

"Course yer'd ache in a hot place like this ole hole?" David resumed, determined to extract a few crumbs of sympathy. "It's so blamed hot yer can stick postage-stamps on me anywheres 'thout spittin' on 'em."

"David!" in a sharp tone.

"Yes, Mother dear!"

"Never use that word again!"

"No'm!" and his mind dwelt seriously, for a time, upon an affair with a certain Bill Dow, a tin tub, and such matters.

It was some minutes before the silence was again broken by David's pleading "Can't I go out now?"

"No, not until your time is up!"

"How's a feller goin' ter know what's goin' on if he don't go out?"

It was a colorless afternoon for David. He

was suffering from restraint, as a warning against future delinquencies. He coddled himself on a couch, while he thought deeply for a spell, and then made one more effort.

"Mother!"

"Yes, David."

"When is 'sometime'?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the incautious reply. "Sometime is almost any time; it's now."

"Yer said I could have some of that five-pound box of candy sometime, an' so I guess I'll take it now, s'long as now's sometime," David deliberated, with an assured air.

"How's your stomach?" was the unfeeling query.

"Guess th' trouble's 'cause it's empty. Be all right soon as I got sumpthin' in it." Then, hopefully, "Maybe it's a backache after all, I'm gettin' so thin livin' here I can't tell if it's a backache or stummick-ache."

There was no response, naught was heard except the steady click of Mrs. Hamilton's industrious needles. David felt his half-gained victory slipping from him. Again he essayed, desperately, "I heard Father tell yer once that yer'd

better not give other people's children candy an' in'jestible things like that, but ter practise on yore own!"

Mrs. Hamilton looked at the clock; then at the innocent youth before her. Next, she fetched the candy, and administered a satisfying portion for the stomach's sake, wondering who, after all, had been selected for the afternoon sacrifice.

"That will do, David," she said rather wearily. "Your time is up. Better run down to the Capitol and tell your father we dine out to-night."

"There, what'd I tell yer!" he declared, as his swiftly moving form passed out the door. "If yer don't have company ter dinner, yer go an' dine out; might as well be an orfin'."

Once outside the house, David's impetuous rush quickly gave place to a loitering gait. With a silent song of thanksgiving at his release, he cast about him in quest of anything of a diverting nature.

Before reaching the end of the block, he caught a vague glimpse of a small flying form rapidly disappearing around the corner. The color and general bearing of this vanishing figure looked strangely familiar, so David sped after. Around the turn and down the cross street he ran in fierce

pursuit, shooting hasty glances at the backs of the tree-boxes, as he flew along. The third white-washed monstrosity brought its reward; David detected a pair of shiny eyes peeping through the slats from a face as black as tar.

"Hi there!" breathlessly panted the pursuer, as he clutched at one of the slats to help stay his flight. "Yer good-for-nothin', shiftless imp, you! what yer mean by tryin' ter run away from yore master?"

"I ain't done try run away; sho I ain't!"

"Well, then, it looks mighty like it! 'Sides, yer haven't been 'round fer two whole days, an' didn't I tell yer ter come every aft'noon?"

"You sho did, Dave—"

"Here! you call me Master David! Didn't I buy yer fer my own nigger fer twenty-five cents fer a whole week; an' ain't I yore master?"

"Yes Da—Masser David, but my ma, she done make me help at home yes'day an' th' day befo! I'll be yo' nigger two days mo' ter mak' up."

"Come 'long with me then, yer worthless black rascal!" David ordered, as he led the way towards the Capitol.

The language used on this occasion was the

fruit of careful heed given to the talk on the dock whenever a steamer touched at the island during his visit to Florida. David was very proud of his efficiency in this line.

When they had entered the spacious grounds surrounding the historic edifice, David commanded his youthful slave to lie face down upon the grass. On this improvised couch, the young master took his seat, while lazily fanning himself with his straw hat as he rocked back and forth on the precarious support. He was allowed but a brief season of rest, for his bondman shortly became uneasy, following with signs of mutiny, as he wriggled and squirmed while complaining, "Here you! I nebber sold myself fur no rockin'-cha'r!"

David indolently struggled to his feet before contending, in a dictatorial manner, "I guess yer'll do whatever I tell yer to or yer won't get any quarter of a dollar! Come 'long 'gain, now!" as he once more wended his dilatory way in search of his father.

They had proceeded scarcely a dozen steps ere David observed the cadet-gray uniform of a Capitol policeman rounding a bunch of shrubbery a few hundred feet ahead. This vision caused the

former quickly to interrogate his vassal, "D'see that cop?" pointing in the direction of the latter's disappearance.

"Sho's you bo'n! I allus sees 'em."

"Beat it then!" David rapped out. "Get as near as yer can an' holler, 'Cheeser! Cheeser!' — yer know th' rest. Yer get him goin' an' yer can have th' rest of th' afternoon off."

The whites of Peter's eyes enlarged considerably, but he energetically set out to do as he was bidden, with David close in his wake that he might not miss the almost certain chase that would result from the hurling of this time-honored war-cry, so irritating to all members of this uniformed body protecting Uncle Sam's property. It was fortunate that the boys slowed up at the mass of shrubs where the officer was last seen, in order to reconnoiter, for they beheld him drowsily lounging on a bench not thirty feet distant.

Peter hesitated, looked at David, and then made a desperate attempt to bolt. His temporary owner was too quick, and so held him to his task, which was made the more palatable by David's displaying a large bon-bon and whispering, "Sic him now, an' yer get this!"

The little black boy made one frantic clutch at

the tempting bait, as he chanted at the top of his voice "Cheeser! Cheeser! Billy-goat Sneezer!" and then was away like a whirlwind, leaving David so limp from laughter that, for once, he was caught off his guard. Thus he jumped in guilty fright upon feeling a strong hand grasp him by the shoulder accompanied by the menacing bluster, "I've got ye this toime! I'll teach ye to call th' likes of me sich names as that!"

The person who thus took liberties with our hero was a burly Irishman, who had a noticeable way of constantly distorting his mouth with the evident desire of exposing two heavily gold-filled teeth slightly abaft the right-hand corner of his enormous slit of a facial opening. Being possessed of great self-esteem, any such insult as that heaped upon him by Peter was vigorously resented.

"I didn't-do-it!" stammered his captive.

"Don't yes tell me thot! Wa'n't Oi roight there, on th' fust bench, just beyant th' bushes? There wa'n't any wan else here. C'u'dn't hev got away, anyhow!"

"Yes, there was some one else here, too!" David contradicted, now becoming more alarmed. "There was a little nigger here; he did it. See

him runnin' way down there!" jerking his fist towards the rapidly vanishing boy, at the same time reserving judgment as to the merits of the officer's last boast, as he took stock of the unathletic form.

"Well, ye had yore finger in th' pie, too! Coom on now! Oi'm thinkin' a short shpell down in th' ould Capitol ding'on will do ye some good," as he forced the squirming boy once more on his interrupted journey.

Now this minion of the law had no thought other than to give his supposed tormentor a good scare, but, to David, it was all very real. Not only was he pretty thoroughly frightened by this time, but, in his present company, he had a very peculiar dislike to crossing the broad expanse of pavement in front of the great building. He must do something, and quickly! His brain was working like a high-tension dynamo. He rapidly discarded several schemes as wholly unworthy this very critical period in his great experience. At last, just as they had traversed the asphalt without meeting any one whom he knew,— although numerous strange boys tagged on behind in great glee,— and were about to enter the arched entrance beneath the wide central steps on the East

side, that leads in beneath the rotunda, and in direct way to the dingy iron-grated cell in the somber basement, David thought he had evolved a promising plan.

"Say, you're takin' some chances by holdin' on ter me!" he asserted.

"What's thot ye say, young one?"

"I tell yer yer'd better lemme go! I'm carryin' a message ter th' United States Senate Chamber, an' if anythin' should happen ter make me late, I don't know what would happen. Th' President might declare war!"

The officer stopped, and gazed fixedly at his prisoner before venturing, "Don't ye be thryin' any of yore games on me, my son! It ain't for the likes of ye ter tell me what's me duty! Shure Oi know me business!"

"If yer don't b'lieve it yer jes' take me ter th' head doorkeeper at th' Senate an' see him pass me in," was the unshaken boast.

David was on sure ground this time. He and a very celebrated, aged historian enjoyed the singular distinction of the "Freedom of the Senate," and this is how it came about:

But first let us finish with the police. That individual was sorely puzzled; with some whole-

some advice, he meant to have released David at the yawning door of the dungeon. Now he was curious and just a trifle worried, so, instead, instructed David to lead the way, and prove his case, "But don't yez be thryin' ter run!" he admonished.

David made good, to the great astonishment of his recent captor.

"Who's that bye," the latter demanded of the doorkeeper, "and how th' divil did yez happen ter let him by?"

"Oh, his father belongs to this club," was the smiling reply. "Why, does anything appear to be the matter?"

"No!" was the astonished rejoinder. "He an' Oi just picked 'quaintance out beyant in th' park, an' I coom walkin' 'long wid him joist friendly like." Then, as he slipped down the marble stairway, "Holy Mike, an' I moight hev lost me job!"

He would have been still more concerned had he chanced to discover that David's father was the chairman of a certain committee which had much to do with the affairs of the District of Columbia — mayor, as it were, of that ten-miles-square of territory.

Now, at last, this is how it came about that our troublesome hero passed without challenge the alert chief guardian of the hallowed precinct wherein assembled that deliberative body, the United States Senate — a very human and simple reason: To David's father, this particular doorkeeper was beholden for his position, so, under certain restrictions and conditions, he allowed the young son of his benefactor this unusual privilege. These conditions were, at times, a trifle onerous, but David had strictly lived up to them.

The Senate pages, for the most part, were a good set of boys; many of them less well-to-do relatives or connections of the Senators themselves. So, withal, David found, in this group, many lively playmates upon whom he drew for entertainment when things of greater moment were not pressing. As he mingled among and frequently sat with them on the steps about the Vice-Presidential chair, it was but natural that he should be confused with the pages, and so, in case he were left alone, as the others were sent to execute the many commissions with which they were so continually entrusted, David was cautioned to respond to any Senator who might snap

his fingers for a messenger, and, furthermore, to do his bidding.

Thus, aside from the many members of that august body to whom he was known through family intimacy, there was hardly a Senator who did not feel David's individuality, and so call him by name. In fact, some of them had good cause for more than a passing acquaintance with that young gentleman.

It is to be hoped that the reader has borne with all these details with due patience, as they are necessary to make clear some matters that are to follow.

That the sequence of events may not become confused, let us now return to Mrs. Hamilton. No sooner did her "tour of duty," sitting watch over her wayward son, come to a welcome end, that afternoon, than, as a means of relaxation, she left the house, and sought relief in a long walk down into the city, whence she caught a return street-car for her homeward journey.

As this particular, bobbing vehicle was jogging along, skirting the Capitol grounds, a small boy, bearing a bundle of papers firmly clutched under his arm, swung himself aboard; thrust his eel-like body past the few strap-hangers, who, with undy-

ing custom, were congregated in the neck of the bottle, and cried lustily:

"'Evening *Star'!* All about everything!"

For a sweeping summary of the news, this should be sufficient for the requirements of any enterprising newsmonger.

Although the little newsboy's entrance had not at first attracted Mrs. Hamilton's attention, the startling familiarity of the voice gave her a decided thrill, and, forsooth, there was David doing a land-office business, dealing out papers, and making change as he wriggled his way towards her. The boy was too engrossed in his novel traffic to take note of the faces ahead of him. In due course, his tortuous progress was brought to a decided check by a firm voice very close to his ear interposing, "Here, little boy, I'll buy a paper!"

The one addressed gave a perceptible start. With doubtful motion, he proffered the paper to this new patron, who seized the opportunity to pronounce, in a low, suppressed tone, "David, give me all your papers! Every one! Here is the pay for them. Yes, give me back the change! Now you go and return the money to the boy from whom you got the papers, and then march

yourself straight home as quickly as you know how!"

"Yes'm."

David slipped off the moving car with an alacrity that betokened considerable practice.

"Jes' my dern luck!" he soliloquized in a tone of supreme disgust. "How'd I know she was goin' ter be on that car? Wonder what she'll do ter me? Wish I'd let that fathead of a cop chuck me inter th' ole dungeon, an' then I couldn't have done it! I'm goin' ter do sumpthin' quick an' go ter prison fer life, then they'll be sorry they didn't make home pleasant fer David!"

On his wandering way to the seat of Justice, he fell in with Sinker, who, noticing his friend's depressed looks, encouraged him with "Cheer up! the worst is yet ter come!"

This was so near David's own view of the situation, that it was passed without comment.

Receiving no response, Sinker continued, "What's th' matter, anyhow? You're about as cheerful as th' last day of vacation!"

As David started to explain, Sinker shut him off with, "Sh! Hush up! Here comes that snoop, Sir Archibald. You turn th' other way; don't get his conceit up by looking at him, an' I'll

go by with th' haughty stare! Gee, how I hate him! He's th' stuck-up-edest thing I ever saw! See how he walks, he kind of stomachs along."

"There, I reckon that'll hold th' pie-faced monkey fer a while," was Sinker's satisfied conclusion after the little passage at arms.

This matter attended to, David's case was next thoroughly discussed with all its direful probabilities.

His spirits were very much depressed; so many untoward events pressing hard, one upon the other, during a single short afternoon, may have discouraged this usually valiant person.

Being unable to detect any silver lining to his leaden sky, he desperately proposed to Sinker that they swap mothers, as his friend's over-fond parent had the reputation of being very easy-going and indulgent.

Sinker gave the plan serious consideration, but solemnly declined the swap when advised that, otherwise, each one was to retain his own belongings, thus putting the gaining of Alfred and sundry other coveted possessions out of the question.

No practical solution coming out of this last effort to escape the penalty of his conduct, David

dolefully declared, with mournful resignation, "I don't care! I'm bad! jes' as bad as I can be. I'm goin' ter catch it, anyhow, so it don't make any difference! I was bad yes'day; I was bad ter-day; an' I'm goin' ter be bad ter-morrow!"

Although it is likely that there was sound judgment back of this despondent statement, nevertheless, Sinker had other views, for he desired no unnecessary deprivation of David's society. Consequently, he was vigilant in seizing any plan that might palliate the anticipated blow. After much consideration, he finally proposed, "I'll tell yer what, Dave; when yer get home, skin right up ter yore own room, shakin' yore frame fer all you're worth, so they'll hear it all over th' house, an', perhaps, yore mother'll think you're orful sorry an' not do anythin' ter yer!"

David looked up with keen appreciation. He knew the effectiveness of this breath-catching kind of sobbing — the variety that causes one to wonder, in silent dread, if each period of quiet, following a violent intake of breath, is not the last earthly effort of the afflicted. "Maybe I can put that over!" he agreed, hopefully. He recalled, when Nancy was much younger, and used to cry in that same fashion, how anxious his

mother used to become, for she sometimes uneasily expressed her feelings by, "That child makes me so nervous that I feel just like pulling the cry right out of her!"

"Here we are," David continued. "I'll try it! Yer go out in th' back yard an' hang 'round and lissen ter me do th' boo-hoo act!"

Not a detail in hair-raising agony was omitted by this polished actor. With face convulsively dug into his pillow, lying at full length on his bed, his mother found him, having been fearfully hastened thereto by distracting sounds of mortal affliction which penetrated every nook and cranny of the house.

"What is it, David?" she sympathetically inquired, as her hands smoothed his tumbled hair.

"I-can't-help-cryin'," he tumultuously sobbed. "Ther' comes a time when everybody has ter cry; it does 'em good! I have not cried fer over a week, an' I've had lots of hurts an' pains!"

"There! There! David," consoled Mrs. Hamilton, surveying him quizzically, "don't carry on so, get up and run out to play!"

"I can't. Don't never want ter play any more," he asserted, but a trifle less tearfully. "If I did, I'd sure do sumpthin' I hadn't ortter. I try orful

hard ter be good; people don't know how orful hard I try. That poor boy, who has ter support a sick mother, was orful grateful fer all th' papers I sold fer him. But I'll never try ter do any charity work again! Never!"

"Get up, David, an' go over to Sinker's! It will do you good!" his bewildered mother hazarded, sorely distraught as to the proper way to administer justice on such a baffling occasion.

"Well, if yer say I must, I suppose I gotter!" was the dejected submission, as he wearily dragged his bended form down the hall, leaving his puzzled parent gazing fixedly after through a haze of perplexity.

CHAPTER X

A NOTE OF APOLOGY

MRS. HAMILTON'S face argued for trouble. Standing at attention were Nancy Packard, looking as fresh as a new-grown mushroom and deliciously expectant; David, who seemed to have no relish for the proceeding, his gaze glued on the ceiling, appearing to reflect scientific research into the subject of ceilings in general; and the little handmaiden, Roulette, awkwardly chewing the end of a battered pencil, casting furtive glances, the while, at David, as if to catch an inspiration from that sphinx-like humorist.

"Which one of you children set the clock half an hour ahead, in school, yesterday?" Mrs. Hamilton demanded, with determination pictured all over her countenance.

No one answered.

"Did you do it, Roulette?"

"No, mam; 'deed I didn't!"

"Do you know who did?" Mrs. Hamilton cross-questioned.

"No-o'm — yes'm; leastwise, I has suspicions," was the evasive answer.

"Did you do it, David?" was the next rapid probe.

"Yes'm."

"What did you do it for?"

"Well," David considered, trying to gain time, "I thought Miss Lang looked kinder tired, an'—"

"David, you can stay in that half-hour this afternoon, and write a note of apology to Miss Lang. I should think she would look tired!"

"It won't take any half-hour ter write an apology ter that old—"

"David!"

"Yes'm."

"You children ought not to worry me so much," his mother thus rebuked them all. "You should be good, for the more I worry over you the more wrinkles I get. David, your father is always saying, 'If you worry you get a wrinkle.'"

"Mother," commented David dryly, "what an orful naughty child you must have been when yer were little, jes' look at all th' wrinkles grandmother's got!"

Nancy laughed outright; Roulette fled to the kitchen, disgracefully giving way to her suppressed giggles long ere reaching the seclusion of that sanctuary, while David, with a profound expression of gravity, was studying a prayer-book that he had taken from the table, followed quickly by, "Mother, I guess I'll study my next Sunday-school lesson, don't yer want ter help me? It's orful hard, an' I'm terribly worried I can't understand it."

"David, you go to my desk and write that letter to Miss Lang!"

"Yes'm."

After a trying period of head-scratching, shuffling of feet, penholder-chewing and other sundry devices helpful to the bestirring of juvenile thoughts on distasteful subjects, the scratching of his pen, at last, could plainly be heard all over the room, as he worked his laborious way across the sheet.

Then followed an interval of portentous quiet, ending with:

"Look, Mother!"

"I'm listening, David."

"I don't think Miss Lang ought ter have guessin' games in school, do you?" he sounded.

"Good chance ter say sumpthin' in this note about it, 'cause it's very undecentable of her."

"What guessing games?"

"Well," David hesitated, in a tone of measureless aggravation, "she asks yer how much eleven an' thirteen are, an' yer guess, an' if yer don't guess right yer go ter th' foot."

"We won't mention that fact in the note, David," was the curt reply. This time, Nancy vanished, suppressing her audacious merriment by the simple process of gagging herself by frantically crowding her small mouth full of pocket-handkerchief.

The boy returned to his objectionable task, and once more the scratching was as painfully discernible as the passing of a tooting motor-car at a country funeral.

The aggravating scribe devoted the next few moments to the tormenting process of slowly tearing away a corner of the blotting paper and wrapping it around the pen, followed by a pulling and wrenching, in an effort to remove it from the holder; all to the accompaniment of a variety of spectacular bodily contortions and grunts and groans.

Receiving neither sympathy nor evoking any

maternal interest, he desperately grasped the offending implement firmly between his teeth, and gave the holder a vengeful jerk. The unlooked success attending this move brought his elbow into violent conflict with a corner of the desk.

"Eouch! Dern it! My crazy-bone!" was the torrential flood of temper let loose. "Aren't it th' darn'dest luck fer a good little boy like me ter break his arm writin' ter that ole she-d —"

"David! Stop that at once!"

"Yes'm."

Then, after a brief spell, as a new pen was being wrathfully fitted to the holder, the pious youth muttered, as if to himself, "Aren't it the blam'dest that every ole, stiff-necked, hawk-nose, cross ole jay of a teacher's got some fierce name like Ida or Myra? Never knew one ter be called some sweet name like Alice or Charlotte. That nasty ole four-eyed crow we cart all round th' country jes' ter keep her out th' poorhouse, 's got a name that —"

"David, were you speaking to me?" was the parental question delivered in that leisurely and absent-minded manner that was gall and wormwood to David. On these occasions he was left in a great state of perplexity as to whether his

mother had heard and weighed each word, and so was acting a part, or he had wasted his entire effort.

"No'm!" Then, after another period of head-scratching:

"Look, Mother, don't yer think yer ortter see a doctor 'count yer 'jestion?"

"Why, what do you mean? My digestion is perfect." Mrs. Hamilton gave her son a furtive glance expressing misgivings as to where this peculiar outbreak might be leading.

"Well, ole Lang—"

"David! you must be more respectful towards—"

"Aren't she old?" he cut in. "Well, anyhow, we discovered all 'bout our insides at school ter-day, an' ole — Miss Lang said that there was only one way ter eat things right an' 'bout forty-leven ways ter eat wrong."

"Yes, David, I know. I'm always telling you to chew your food much more than you do or you will have indigestion."

"That's what th' ole crow — Miss Lang, I mean — says, an' that in'jestion makes people cross, an' so I didn't know but what if yer went ter see a doctor you'd get better an' be nicer ter

yore little boy. Course, I'm orful sorry if yore stummick troubles yer, but —"

"David, you go on with that letter!" There was mingled wrath and appreciation in her voice.

"I like history," he again broke off. "We've jes' begun history, an' it's 'most all fights!"

After one or two more of these mental foraging trips, alike in their dearth of results, he folded his paper, creased it with his thumb-nail, enclosed it in an envelope, and was about to seal it, when his mother stopped the proceeding with "Let me read it first, David!"

"It's all right, Mother!" was the assuring answer. "I know yer'll like it," again preparing to moisten the mucilage.

"David, give that note to me!"

"Yes, mother, course I will, if yer want me to."

We reproduce the note with spelling and punctuation materially improved:

"Dear Miss Lang:

"I am awful sorry I touched the clock. Honest I am. I get sorrier every minute, and I am thinking of you all the time. I hope you won't forget the little boy who is thinking of you so much. Here is a beautiful poem I heard, maybe if you keep it you will think of me:

'Forget me not, forget me never!
'Til heaven and earth shall bump together!'

"Yours respectfully,
"DAVID T. T. HAMILTON."

Mrs. Hamilton's mind flashed a tacit agreement that the steady-purposed teacher's memory would have cause to serve her well enough in that direction, but her face was devoid of any trace of emotion as she asked, "What do those two 'T's' stand for in your name?"

"Hick Hunt says if yer put 'em in yer can write anythin' yer want ter, whether yer mean it or not, an' it aren't wicked."

"What do they stand for, David?" his mother insisted, looking at him shrewdly.

"Well, they — Hick Hunt says — they stand fer ''Taint True'!"

"David, I think you had better write another note."

"But, Mother, it's 'most all true. Aren't I orful sorry? an' don't yer think she orter remember th' dear little children who have come into her ole-maid life, an'—"

"David," in desperation, "you give me that note and go outdoors and play!"

"Yes'm."

CHAPTER XI

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ALBINO LADY

"SAY, Doggy! I've got an orful gloom on this aft'noon!" David thus relieved his troubled mind, a few days later. "Yores truly butted into sumpthin' last night, all right!

"Yer get me, don't yer, ole feller?" as a series of moist grimaces accompanied by many awkward bodily contortions — all requisite to the successful swishing of a sadly frayed tail — indicated a whole-souled interest in the forthcoming narrative. "I'd a hunch yer would! Well, I'll tell yer 'bout it," striving desperately, for the purpose of bestowing a few friendly caresses, to localize the wiggling head, which was in a constant irruption of lapping delight. "Yer see, ole chap, one of th' guys from th' Jap'nese 'Gation was calling on my governor last evenin', an' I was sittin' on th' floor reading — yer know th' place, back of that ole high-backed sofa, fixed cat-a-cornered, where I sit under a light an' read so's they can't

see me, an'll forget ter send me ter bed. Yer know, 'cause yer offen smells me out there, an' I'm always 'fraid you'll put 'em wise."

A nervous, fluid application on his master's face showed feeling appreciation of this fine point.

"Well, as I was tellin' yer, I was sittin' in that corner while th' Jap'nese thing-um-bobit was talkin' ter Dad 'bout some tariff thing. What's a tariff? Search me, ole chap! Well, when they got through all that dry drool, Dad, he kind of friendly like, asked how th' Yellow Boy was gettin' on — was he homesick or sumpthin' like that; jes' ter make talk, I guess. That made th' little, sawed-off chirk up some, an' he thanked Dad in more than a chapter of hot-air, an' ended by tellin' how he'd been 'flicted with an orful tooth-ache, an' could th' Honorable Senator — making motions an' s'lams like he was 'fore a king — tell him th' best dentist ter go ter. Yes, yer get on, don't yer?" as the liquid dispensary again got to work.

"It was such swell fun settin' back soakin' it all up, that I clean fergot they didn't know I was in th' room, an' so I jes' jumped right up — say, yer ole four-legs, yer jes ortter seen that Dago's face as I popped into sight! Well, Dad properly

interduced us with some sort of a 'pology fer my bein' 'round. Maybe th' Jap thought I was a spy or sumpthin', 'cause he kept lookin' at me orful 'spicious.

"Then I allowed I was sorry his Highness had a toothache, an' guessed I knew a cure that'd save goin' ter any ole dentist.

"'What iss it, little boy?' Mister Google-eyes wanted ter know. His face was all lit up like a ball of fire.

"Then I told him ter fill his mouth with cold water an' sit on th' kitchin' stove till it boiled, an' after that his tooth wouldn't bother him any more.

"Now, Alfred, ole doggums, can yer see anythin' in that ter cause Mister Minister ter get up an' dust, an' for my Dad to—? Well, he did, an' I'm goin' ter give yer th' honor of my company here in this room all th' aft'noon. Aren't yer some glad? Wonder what I'll do next! Seem all th' time ter be gettin' into diplematic dif'culties, as Dad tells me. Me for th' good ole North where there aren't anything worser than Chink laundries. I wish th' dinged, ole, almoned-eyed, rat-eater joy with his horrid ole jaw-ache!"

Further confidences of this charitable nature

were here cut short by sounds of an enlivening character which drew David hastily to a window that gave access on to a steep lean-to roof over the one-story kitchen. With his face aglow with gratification, he warned his four-footed companion, "Sh! Don't shoot off yore mouth, now, an' give us away! 'cause here comes Sinker scramblin' like an egg." Then he again turned to watch the latter's cat-like movements, designed to hide himself from curious eyes below, while maintaining a precarious foot-hold on the slippery tin.

David raised the screen that nothing might retard his friend's anxious leap through the window, whence he landed sprawling on top of Alfred, cavorting in frenzied welcome.

The surprise was mutual, and the scurry to right the difficulties equally so, if a volley of yelps, from the one, and a general tirade against "lazy lummux of fool dogs," from the other joined to the acrobatic features in evidence were in any way indicative of the situation.

"Saw yo' signal ter come in th' window an' cut out th' door-bell. What's up? Doin' time? Those ole Lawrences up in th' air 'gain?" was the battery of rapid-fire questions that the visitor

unlimbered as soon as he freed himself from his entanglement with vacillating Alfred.

David first did the hospitality of furnishing his guest with a piece of the now carefully hoarded rattan — a sure token of great liberality and duly appreciated by Sinker — while between his own fiery puffs, he observed, "Yep, I'm sentenced fer th' whole aft'noon." Then he related, for Sinker's benefit, what Alfred had already absorbed with such deep attention. But the latter's tongue-like enthusiasm showed no lessened interest in this rehearsal of the affair.

"Say, yer certainly did deliver th' goods, didn't yer?" was Sinker's hearty comment, as, with faint gasp, he appeared to enter into the spirit of the occasion. Suddenly altering his manner, he removed the smoldering rattan from between his lips, while his eyes lit up with the concentration of bewildered scrutiny, as he almost shouted the question, "In th' name of th' people, what's come over yo' beautiful countenance?"

Somewhat disconcerted, David chopped off a disjointed explanation, "Oh, well — yer see, some of 'em pieces of rattan's bigger'n others, an' while I was puffin' on a big piece — so's ter save th' best fer you fellers," this last with sudden

hopefulness, " th' blamed thing flared up jes' like a Roman-candle, an' singed all my eyebrows an' lashes spang off."

This was a very bitter pill for David for more reasons than one. If the cause of the catastrophe became known to his fellows, he believed it would brand him as the merest novice at the manly art of smoking. Again, the disfigurement was astonishing, and David was just blossoming into that age where the good opinion of those of about his own years among the gentler sex was becoming desirable.

Has the reader ever unexpectedly chanced upon an old friend thus bereft of all hirsute adornment about the eyes? If not, no attempt here will ever adequately convey the astonishing alteration such a person will undergo by so simple a disfigurement. Once in a while, one will encounter some stranger with a most peculiar and baffling unattractive appearance about the face. It may be passed quite unexplained, or the critical observer may determine that it is due to a very scant supply of eyebrows and eye-lashes. After all, consider the immense amount of energy that has been expended by love-story enthusiasts over the " long eye-lashes "— with interminable changes — of

the heroine! How dependent is the human physiognomy upon these few hairs for beautifying effect!

In a word, David's little, round, chubby face had lost them — in toto.

"Gee, but don't yer look like a simp!" was the bantering bit of consolation offered by Sinker.

"Well, don't spread it 'round!" was the rueful protest.

Each puffed away in comtemplative silence for a few moments before Sinker made inquiry: "What'd a' happened if I'd a' rung th' door-bell and asked fer yer?"

"Yer'd been told that Master David was not home ter friends this aft'noon. Yer see, I'm gettin' ter be th' reg'lar swell thing 'bout receiving my callers."

"Huh! Reckon them up-in-the-airs was pow'ful glad ter have yo' mother give any such orders. She's an orful cat, that ole Lawrence guy; I hate that woman! No matter, we've put one over on 'em, anyhow, an' I can almost jump right on my head on th' floor fer joy right now, I can."

David nodded his head absently, as the rather noisy rattan consumption again went on apace.

He appeared to be engaged in some absorbing scheme.

"What we goin' ter do?" Sinker restlessly investigated.

"See anythin' of Roulette, as yer came in?" David asked, ignoring the other's question.

"Yep, but what of it? She's out yonder sunnin' on th' kitchen steps; looked lazy as a clam," peering at him inquiringly.

"Gosh, good! Here, hurry!" David then scrawled a few words on a piece of paper, which needed some smoothing out as it had been chewed at in off moments by Alfred. Rapidly tying the note to a piece of string, he rattled on, "Slip along th' roof, an' dangle this down where Roulette'll see it!"

"What is it?" Sinker returned.

"Never mind now; tell yer 'bout it soon's yer get a bite an' come back. Hurry now, you're liable ter lose her."

Success crowned their effort. While waiting for the result, David explained that Nancy Packard was sick in her room, and needed cheering up. "Ben eatin' lobsters, an's sorry ever since. Guess she's 'bout all right now, but's 'fraid she'll have ter study if she gets up."

Just then, there was a creaking sound in the hall. David stealthily opened the door and pulled in the little colored girl.

"Sh!" David cautioned, as Roulette's inquisitive face threatened an explosion. Then when he had closed the door: "Say, Roulette, want ter help play a joke on Nancy?"

"Yes, in-deedy," she replied, her shiny countenance lighting up with eagerness.

"That's th' stuff, then! 'Spose yer could sneak down an' bluff th' cook out of a cupful of molasses 'thout them snaky Lawrences gettin' on ter yer?"

"I spec' I kin. Dey ain't nebber goin' cotch dis yere chile; co'se dey ain't!" Silently as an Indian she stole through the door that David opened the least possible for her exit.

"What's th' game?" Sinker persisted, to whom the arrangements were not at all clear.

"Goin' ter make an Albino girl outer her; like what we saw at th' circus," was the unblushing proposition.

"Gee! How?" catechized Sinker, his face, nevertheless, expressing decided approval of anything so unusual.

"Smear her kinky hair all over with molasses,

an' then open a feather pillow on top," David succinctly explained.

"Whoop-la!" the other shouted in ecstatic glee. "But," as his face fell, "she won't stan' fer it!"

"You jes' wait an' see! Here she is now. Close yore face!"

Grinning with exultation, Roulette panted into the room deftly balancing a bowl brimming full of dark, sticky molasses.

"Look here, Roulette," David lost no time in beginning, with a surreptitious wink at his confederate, "do yer remember that beautiful Albino lady I told yer 'bout seein' at th' circus?"

"Sho, I does."

"Well, wouldn't yer like us ter fix yer up jes like her, an' then yer go pay a call on Nancy? She won't know yer from a beautiful angel, an' 'll be orful sprized when she finds out such a lovely lady as yer will be, is jes' you!"

Roulette's shiny eyes showed her delighted agreement with the plan, even if her "'Deed, I would," had been lacking.

At the expense of much strategy, and accompanied by a continual complimentary prattle — for had he not once heard his mother declare that

Roulette could stand an endless amount of praise? — David completely covered the little darkey's hair, face, and neck with a sticky coating of molasses. Then, before she was fully aware of his intentions, he caught up a sofa cushion, ran his knife along a seam, and emptied the contents over Roulette's prepared head. Then both the boys added more, here and there, excavating openings for nose and mouth. She seemed to grow like a rolling snow-ball on a melting day.

Her first protestations, at this outlandish headgear, immediately gave way before the exclamations of, "See th' fine white lady! Ain't she a peach?" and others; some of doubtful double meaning.

Nancy's room was at the end of the same hall as that entered from David's, so, with door ajar, the two conspirators waited events, as Roulette softly tapped on the former's door and was bidden to enter.

Hysterical gasps; explosions of mirth; convulsive shouts; choking spasms of laughter; ten times more voluminous than it seemed possible could emanate from such a wee, dainty bit of a girl as Nancy, reached their receptive ears. Then

there swept back into the hallway a wrathful, spitting, improvised Albino, rapidly disfiguring her half-bushel countenance by snatching away great clutches of feathery whiteness as the gullible creature vowed eternal vengeance on her youthful tormentors.

"You jes' wait, you two good-for-nothing lil' debbels, you; you'll get cotched up with, sho's you bo'n! I'll eat th' heart right out ob yo's wu'thless bodies! That I will! You better watch out!" In a frenzy of rage, she sought her room, leaving a trail of feathers behind as she angrily cast handfuls to both sides, liberally besprinkling the floor while she tore along.

It was no time for idle hands, removing the sticky make-up; late that night she was still picking at refractory spots that seemed to delight in a certain persistent adhesiveness in the intricate kinks of the typical African head. And for days, signs of her vain-glory were still noticeable, evoking much unholy mirth from certain youthful people.

"It aren't such an orful quiet afternoon even if yer do have to stay in," Sinker observed, as he stretched himself out on the window-seat, and relighted his rattan.

"Not so's yer'd notice it," his companion grinned, reminescently picking up the empty pillow-case and replacing portions of its telltale contents, widely scattered about the room.

CHAPTER XII

TRIFLING WITH THE DIGNITY OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE

"I NEVER knew a week ter go as slow as this one," grumbled David. He and Sinker were once more making inroads upon the fading stock of rattan, while hidden away beneath the kitchen steps in what our hero's father descriptively termed their "glory-hole."

"There's nothin' ter look forward ter," David resumed, after three unsuccessful attempts at blowing smoke-rings. "Hasn't anybody got an orful lot of pep in 'em 'bout here."

Ring-practice was continued during a short interval that was otherwise peaceful; when Sinker suddenly whispered, with one eye close to a crack in the boarding, "Say, there comes th' grocer man, he'll be spoonin' with th' Lawrence waitress in a minute! I reckon we're onto them, all right!"

David looked and grunted a happy approval of the new field of operations that this vista opened. "Sh! Talk low!" he warned, as the prospective victim was heard mounting the steps.

Before David's attacks, the clothes-hamper had long since fallen to pieces, greatly to the mystification of its proprietors. Upon its being discarded for one of different fiber, the wreck had been gathered in by our two friends in the "glory-hole," by whom this vast windfall of good smoking material was used to increase their ascendancy over less fortunate companions. But even that unusual store was now near the point of extinction.

"Yer aren't any good at rings, Dave," Sinker critically observed with that freedom from over-praise that boys enjoy. "Yer jes ortter see ole Jedge Sparhawk down in our town. He sits in his office 'side a big table, an' blows rings way 'crost it an' spits through th' ring inter a box of sawdust on th' other side. Can't see th' box either, an' never misses it. He's th' greatest expert in our State!"

David's eyes widened in astonishment and envy. He squared himself for a ring-spitting try, when, suddenly, before his mind's eye, appeared a

specter of a certain tin tub. Reluctantly he fell back into his original lounging attitude and began to whistle.

"What's ailin' yer?" Sinker propounded with a quizzical glance.

"Oh! I dunno. Don't think it very gemenly ter spit," was the unvarnished rejoinder. "Don't do it in good s'ciety up North."

"O piffle!" was the disgusted response.

David gave a little start and listened attentively while holding up his hand to signify silence. Low voices could be heard overhead. He reached for a piece of cord dangling in one corner, gave it a sharp pull followed by a great splutter of coughing and strangling and angry feminine screams as a flood of water deluged the little porch floor beneath which the boys were hiding. Then ominous tones of wrath filtered through the cracks as a thoroughly drenched and angry man, mopping his face and neck with his handkerchief, rushed down the steps, mounted a wagon and drove rapidly away.

The boys grinned at one another in mutual satisfaction, while moving away from the rivulets of water that were dripping through the cracks of their roof.

"Whew! O gosh! What's that dog-goned smell?" demanded Sinker, holding his nose with distaste pictured all over his face.

Before replying, David sniffed audibly with a glow of satisfaction. "I jes' put a handful of that stuff in th' water that ole Lawrence spreads on his lawn ter make th' grass grow."

"Sup'phosphate!" fairly yelled Sinker in hearty approval. "I reckon nobody will 'cuse that guy of bein' next ter any sweet-scented lady!"

David's piece of rattan was now so short that the tip of his nose glowed with each draught of smoke. He held the remnant between his fingers, and gazed at it regretfully before burying its telltale presence in the dirt floor of their retreat. "Come on!" he proposed. "Let's go on down ter th' Senate; maybe ther'll be a 'zecutive session, an' there'd be sumpthin' doin' with that bunch of pages."

So they idled along.

"Say!" Sinker indicated the direction by a cant of his head as he spoke. "There's that big speed of a Carroll girl gettin' outer a carriage over yonder; goin' ter a tea, I reckon. Never saw such a girl; don't miss out on anythin'."

"She's always th' lucky guy!" David agreed. "Didn't have ter go ter school last year."

"What'd she do, then?" his friend inquired.

"Oh, she was jes' perfectin' herself, Mother said. An' gee! she's stupid, too; stupid as a pan-head. She never talks anythin' but mush and slush; no real sense like some girls. I don't like her! Nancy says she's one of the pushiest girls in that whole bunch."

"Hold on a minute!" Sinker blurted out. "Got an idea! That old Carroll coachman 'most always goes ter sleep when he's waitin'. Let's get him ter drive us down ter th' Capitol. Heap sight easier than walkin'!"

"How yer goin' ter do it?" demanded David incredulously. "Don't take it fer a public cab, der yer?"

"Oh, yer sneak 'long after me an' yer'll see!" was all the explanation that was forthcoming.

Sinker retraced his steps for some half-block before crossing the street well in the rear of the Carroll equipage. From this point of vantage, Indian-like, they stalked the vehicle. As surmised, the old negro coachman was sound asleep. Carefully opening the door, Sinker motioned David inside and quickly stole in afterwards.

Holding the door slightly ajar and with a very good imitation of a young girl's voice, he commanded: "Rufus!" The coachman quickly came to life and took an upright, attentive posture. "Capitol, Senate entrance!" The door was slammed and they rumbled away.

"Of all th' nerve!" declared David with sparkling eyes.

"Let's light up!" returned his companion. And so they smoked away in unalloyed happiness, as they rolled along the smooth asphalt.

"My mother says that when those Carroll girls were kids, their mother wouldn't let 'em play with toys; only paper flowers, so's they'd grow up ter be artistic," Sinker resumed.

"O splurge!" David commented. "An' I heard they wa'n't allowed ter serve over-hand in tennis as it wasn't ladylike. 'Sides, I heard Dad say they were all manners an' no matter, what yer 'spose he meant?"

"Search me!" was Sinker's helpful explanation. "But what d'yer think Sue Baxter did last summer ter her tutor; yer know she had ter study 'most all summer ter keep up with her class, an' she had a college freshie ter toot her?"

"What'd she do?"

"She got wrathy at sumpthin' th' freshie said an' jammed a fresh chocolate cake all over his face. He got mad an' beat it!"

"Yes, she did?" David marveled in wholehearted admiration.

"Sure! I heard her mother tell my mother so."

"Gee! I'd like ter know that girl, she must be swell fun!" David announced.

"Mother says she's a terror," the other added in further praise. "She went inter deep mournin' fer three days once when her mother was away, jes' fer th' fun of it."

For a brief spell no further discourse was indulged in, when David nearly jumped to his feet with the anxious question, "How we goin' ter get out er here? Run fer it?"

"Naw!" sneered his companion. "Jes' watch me!" At this moment, the carriage drew up at the foot of the steps at the north end of the Capitol. Sinker rapidly opened the door with a whispered "Come quick!" and then, turning gracefully with hat in hand and a certain Southern elegance that was natural to him, continued, "Thank you, Miss Rosalind, for the ride. Oh, yes, I'll tell him," and then turning to the coach-

man, "Rufus, Miss Rosalind would like you to take her directly home," making another sweeping bow as he closed the door. The two boys collapsed on the lower steps, doubled up with laughter.

"Bet Miss Rosalind'll be doin' some tall guessin' when she gets through at that tea!" David chuckled.

"Yes, an' what'd yer give ter see ole Rufus when he finds he's been drivin' an empty!" gloated the other conspirator.

Glowing with exultation the boys mounted the stairs to the Senate gallery where both might go unchallenged. It was a sultry, fly-buzzing afternoon. Some embryo statesman was dragging out the weary hours with an address upon a subject of great importance to himself, but of none whatsoever to his auditors. The few of his fellow Senators who remained in their seats were either drowsing the time along in half-sleepy postures or examining papers and notes on matters of greater interest. The majority of the body was absent from the chamber altogether — for the most part, in the smoking-room adjoining or scattered among their several committee rooms.

David took an experienced and summary glance

of the scene below, and whispered: "Yer hold that seat down while I go an' swipe a pen an' things!"

Sinker smiled understandingly as he returned, "Beat it, then!"

He soon saw his companion emerging from one of the entrances at the rear of the Senate chamber. Slowly he sauntered down the isle until he dropped among the pages lounging in their accustomed seats on the steps about the presiding officer, who, at the time, happened to be Senator Hamilton, as he, more than most of the Senators, was called upon to take the Vice-Presidential chair when that official wished to be relieved from his tedious duties.

Somehow, David had failed to note this strategical position of his father.

After a few moments' whispered conversation with some of the pages, David boldly walked up to his father's desk — as if he were a page and sent there for some papers — lifted the top; might have been observed removing something therefrom; in fact, was so observed by his keen-eyed parent. He then slipped out by the door through which he had entered.

Soon afterwards, Senator Hamilton likewise

observed his son join Sinker just back of the rail in the gallery. Casually, he motioned to the Sergeant-at-arms. To that fearsome dignitary he gave a few instructions, and then turned to the business of the session.

At the time of which we are writing, long after the common steel pen and blotting paper were in common use, the old quill pen and sand-shaking appliance for drying ink were still rigidly adhered to as one of the traditions of the Senate.

Behind the rail, in the otherwise empty gallery, David and Sinker were industriously fitting up one of these old quill pens with a rubber band in such fashion that when a little three-cornered piece, cut from one of Mr. Hamilton's visiting cards, also found in his desk, was inserted into a notch in the pen, it could be shot with a reasonable degree of accuracy by these expert marksmen.

"Now," grinned David, "if that ole windbag don't croak pretty soon, we'll fix him!"

Waiting their chance, when no eyes seemed inclined their way, Sinker urged, "Let him have it!"

The aim was a poor one; the little whirling bit of card sailed high above the intended victim and

over the clerk's desk, landing fairly on Senator Hamilton's forehead.

Not a muscle betrayed that he was conscious of the stinging sensation that he must have experienced. The offending piece fell on the desk before him; calmly he turned it over and made out the letters "Hamil—". A few moments later it might have been noticed that he removed a small object from the desk and carefully placed it in his card-case.

The moment the elastic band twanged, the boys had ducked behind the rail, so did not remark their unwonted success.

The monotonous sing-song of the new-fledged orator continued.

"You try him, Sinker!" David suggested, as they thus knew they had missed their quarry.

Twang! And again a swirling piece of Mr. Hamilton's visiting card sang through the air.

"Gentlemen, I repeat! Nothing in all my experience has ever struck me so forci—"

At this instant the speaker precipitately dropped his carefully arranged handful of notes, muttered some words opposed to the dignity of the Senate, swept a multitude of musty yellow volumes with a crash from his desk, as he pirouetted in his effort

to detect the origin of his woes; forgot himself for a moment and fell into his chair, only to realize that he might "lose the floor." Hastily, he scrambled to his feet again, but too late, for one of the opposition, in the now awakened and amused assembly, was already speaking.

A great wave of relief spread over the heretofore dispirited faces of those Senators who had but half listened to the irksome oratory that had ended in so much confusion.

"Guess we'd better hike!" David gasped, midst choking spasms of suppressed laughter, following the success of their exploit. "But I'll bet yer a million dollars"— David never wagered smaller amounts —"that th' rest of th' bunch are some joyful that we turned off th' breeze from that freshie!"

The boys were dodging from one row of seats to another in an attempt to escape unobserved. With their last rush through the door into the large corridor at the back, they pitched pell-mell into the waiting arms of one of the Capitol police.

"Be gorra! It's disturbin' th' pace av th' Senate, is ut, ye do be at? It'll be some toime before yow'l be doin' it agin, shure! You byes come 'long with me now fur a shpell!"

They were hustled along the corridor and down many steps until finally thrust roughly into the old dungeon beneath the rotunda, whose yawning door David once before had escaped so miraculously.

In the uncertain light of the cheerless tomb, the boys gazed speechlessly at one another, as the key clanked in the cumbersome lock, sending a hopeless chill to their quavering hearts.

But not for long did this depression last! David was the first to pull himself together. Although his hands trembled a trifle, he made a very good face of it in slowly extracting a piece of rattan from his pocket, breaking into halves, and proffering one piece to Sinker with, "Have a smoke?"

"Don't mind — if — I — do!" stammered the other prisoner, eyeing his friend in growing confidence and admiration.

David puffed away while he considered the situation. Soon he examined the door, shaking and rattling the heavy affair to assure himself of its security. Next he took out his knife and tested each crevice in the masonry that showed wear. Then he sat down on the rough bench and pondered.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet and hastened to the door. Peeking through the keyhole, he exclaimed, "Gosh! that smart Aleck of a cop's gone an' left th' key in th' door!"

"Well, what of it? We don't know any magic that'll get it on this side, do we?" was the dejected query.

"Oh, use yer bean! Can't we get some one ter unlock it fer us?" David returned contemptuously. "'Sides, that's th' same footless fat-neck that nearly run me in a week ago. I'd like ter put one over on him, anyway!"

"But how we goin' ter do it, Dave?" challenged the doubtful one, his face a picture of despair.

"Well," explained the schemer, "well—lemme think a minute," scratching his head searching for a plan. "Course a feller's got ter sort of 'range th' job in his mind, ain't he?" trying to gain time.

After a brief interval of anxious thought he blurted out, "I've got it!" with so much vehemence that Sinker, whose nerves were still shaky, jumped perceptibly. David's resourcefulness ordinarily would not cause surprise.

"Jes' th' same, yer needn't scare a feller ter

death if yer have!" Sinker excitedly protested. "What's th' game, anyway?"

"Aren't I goin' ter tell yer!" David impatiently chafed. "Yer be ready ter holler 'Fire! Help! We're burnin' ter death!' an' lots of that same kind er dope, when I give yer th' word! I'll glue my eye ter th' keyhole an' watch fer some one ter pass. While yer'e hollerin' all that skeery stuff, I'll be smokin' like a furnace, an' blow it through th' keyhole fer all I'm worth!"

Sinker grunted contentedly and arranged for his part of the program by rehearsing a series of blood-curdling cries planned to strike terror into the heart of an Egyptian mummy. At the same time, his companion was preparing the way to victory by deftly turning the key with his jack-knife so as to allow as large an opening as possible. Fortunately for the project, this was of considerable size owing to the ponderous dimensions of the old-time lock and key.

Each now took his position and awaited the fateful moment. Sinker, with deepening anxiety at the thought of possible miscarriage of the scheme, moved about uneasily, finally giving vent to his pent-up emotions with, "'Spos'n' that cop's outside keepin' watch!"

"Oh, yer've got bubbles in yore think-tank," was the derisive retort. "I'll bet that lazy lummux humped himself fer a bench in th' park soon's he run us in! He'd call that 'nough fer one day's job. Anyhow, he can chase himself 'round th' block fer all I care!"

But our hero was not nearly so sure of himself as his bold words indicated. He harbored a pretty distinct vision of the possibilities that Sinker's fears suggested. However, the effort to escape must be made at all hazards!

"Sh!" he cautioned. "Puff-puff," to get his rattan in good smoking order. "Here comes — puff-puff — some one! Get ready! Now let her go!" and he blew clouds of smoke through the capacious keyhole.

"Fire! Fire! Help fer heaven's sake! We're burnin' ter death! Help! Help! Fire! Fire! Come quick 'fore it's too late!" followed by howls of hair-raising terror and torture.

Almost instantly the huge door was given a sharp rattle.

"Turn th' key quick 'fore we die!" Sinker continued in a voice suggestive of fast failing strength. The smoke continued to volley through the little aperture.

The key was now being excitedly turned in the lock.

"Be all ready ter dust th' second th' door opens!" David breathlessly cautioned between his inferno-like exertions.

The door did give way at this precise instant, sending David sprawling at the feet of their rescuer. The former had failed to reckon on this possibility in the intensity of his volcanic duties. In his haste to rectify this disaster, he scuttled, with great agility, between the legs of the large man who had come to their aid, sweeping his feet out from under him in the process. Sinker took a flying leap for liberty over the prostrate form of the Good Samaritan. Both boys were out of sight in a flash, leaving their distracted victim greatly mystified at what it might all be about.

In record time, the two culprits, panting painfully, gasping for breath and choking from their exertions, threw themselves with desperate eagerness into the protecting shelter of the "glory-hole." It was some minutes before either could speak, when David nonchalantly handed a piece of rattan to Sinker, with "Have a smoke?"

"Don't mind if I do, but, gosh, yer make me tired! That all yer gotter say?"

Sinker was to spend that night with David. Towards the end of dinner, Mr. Hamilton referred to an experience of the afternoon:

"You know we had rather a serious affair in the Senate to-day," he began. "I was presiding—"

"Gosh, aren't that th' blamedest!" spluttered David to Sinker beneath his breath. "I never looked ter see who was on th' dinged ole throne."

"Did you speak, David?" his father inquired, looking at him in a knowing manner.

"No, sir—that is—I guess not," faltered David.

"Tinkham, the infant prodigy from our newest State, had the floor," Mr. Hamilton continued, with a wary eye on his son. "He had been talking us all to sleep about the world-wide importance to navigation to be derived from an appropriation for dredging out the overgrown brook upon which his little cross-roads town is located, when suddenly he had some kind of a fit; dropped his papers, knocked all his books on to the floor, as he whirled round, and then fell into his chair. Before he could recover himself, Henderson had the floor. We all felt very much relieved!"

"What happened to Senator Tinkham?" some one inquired.

"I imagine I am the only one of his colleagues who suspects," Mr. Hamilton replied, with a crafty smile. "I noticed two boys in the gallery just before it happened. Seemed to have some kind of sling-shot, or weapon of that kind. I called the attention of the Sergeant-at-arms to the matter."

"By gum!" muttered his astonished son.

"Did you speak, David?" his father again questioned, looking curiously in his direction.

"No sir, nothin' of any 'portance."

"Another thing that lends strength to my suspicions," Mr. Hamilton resumed, "is that just before Tinkham got his quietus, some sharp thing struck me a stinging blow on the forehead."

"Oh! Oh!" gasped Sinker. "Eouch, quit it, Dave!" as the latter kicked him on the shin.

Mr. Hamilton looked fixedly at the guilty pair, a peculiar twitching noticeable at the corners of his mouth.

David thought the situation called for immediate attention.

"Who der yer think those two orful boys were, Father?" he queried.

"The light wasn't very good in the gallery just that moment," Mr. Hamilton replied. "I heard that the Sergeant-at-arms had the two little rogues arrested and locked up in the Capitol dungeon!"

"Oh, that was too bad!" grieved Mrs. Hamilton.

"Well you need not waste your sympathies," her husband reassured her; "the little demons escaped. That's the mystery of it! How in the world any one could get out of that dungeon puzzles me!"

"Maybe they were poor little boys who have ter sell papers ter s'port their sick mothers, an' it's a good thing they got away!" David tearfully declared.

"There, David, I am glad to have you show such a good side to your nature!" Mrs. Hamilton proudly observed.

"Yes'm!"

"Oh, by the way," said Mr. Hamilton, taking something from his pocket and examining it searchingly, "I picked up the thing that hit me in the forehead, and—"

"'Scuse us, Mother, please!" interrupted David, hastily pushing his chair back from the table.

"No, David, you better sit down again!" advised his father.

"Yes sir!" as the now thoroughly worried youth fidgeted about in his seat.

"David, come here and see if you can make out the letters on this little piece of card!" his father commanded.

"My head aches an' I can't see very well ternight," David replied, and there was a fair amount of truth in the first part of the statement.

He was forced to try, however. "What do you make out, David?"

"Looks sumpthin' like Ham! Probably piece of a butcher's business card!"

"What's the rest of it?"

"Oh yes, I see now, Hamil—"

"TON," finished his father; "one of my visiting-cards taken from my desk. That will do, David; you can go to your room now!"

As the chamber door was vengefully slammed behind the two companions, now in such disgrace — for it was no idle offense to trifle with the dignity of the Senate of the United States of America, especially to the extent of cannonading its presiding officer, which the boys only too well knew — David ejaculated:

"Gosh-all-hemlock, aren't that th' derndest!"

"Say, Dave, I thought I heard your father laughing fit ter kill as I came down th' hall."

"Yes, yer did!" the other returned, incredulously.

CHAPTER XIII

A NARROW ESCAPE AT MOUNT VERNON

"SAY! fellers," announced Sinker after he with David and Candy Bob were snugly stowed away on the forward deck of the little river steamer that plied back and forth between Washington and that most delightful of all American country-seats — Mount Vernon. "We've got th' funniest guy in our school!"

"Do yer mean queer, or jes' humorous?" David probed, in a bantering tone.

"Well, you'll see!" returned Sinker, not quite clear in his own mind as to the fine distinction, and doubtful if his friend were more discriminating. "This bonehead's been brought up over in England somewhere; never been ter school here 'til this term, an' he makes th' rest of us mad 'nough ter choke him!"

"What's th' Willie boy done?" fussed Candy Bob, with his usual impatience.

"Well, t'other day, our teacher told him he

wasn't sittin' up straight, an' 'stead of lookin' huffy an' givin' her th' icy glance an' keepin' his mouth shut, like any of us kids, th' poor ham jes' straightened up an' smiled sweetly an' said, 'Thank you, Miss Wilson.' Gee! don't that make yer sick?"

"Gosh, ain't he th' pill!" was David's consoling reply.

"Oh, I dunno," argued Candy Bob, who was bullied more or less by the rest of the class. "Guess it won't hurt you roughnecks any ter learn some manners!"

"O gee, lissen ter th' kid!" Sinker returned. "You're comin' on swell, my dear! You're learnin' ter say some very pretty phrases!"

"What yer mean by phazes?" demanded Candy Bob, a trifle nettled by the other's patronizing air.

"Phrases! my son," corrected David. "PHRASES! When yer graduate from th' kindergarten, send Sinker an' me a bid ter come an' see yer do ring-around-th'-rosy!"

"You kids jes' better look out!" fumed their victim, jumping up and taking a threatening attitude.

"Oh! come on, sit down!" Sinker soothingly

urged. "We don't mean anythin'. 'Sides, we all know yer got all th' rest of yer class skinned a mile an' don't half try!"

Thus assuaged, the face of the impetuous youth as quickly broke into a smile as before it had become clouded.

"Well, I dunno," he genially replied, taking up his original position on the anchor chain. "Anyhow, I ain't any such dough-head as Bill Carter," laughing reminiscently.

"What's th' matter with him?"

"Well, th' teacher told 'em in th' French class yesterday, that they couldn't talk anythin' but French, an' when Bill Carter raised his hand an' th' teacher gave him th' sign ter shoot off his face he said, 'Please may I ter *sortier* for ter get some wa — ti — ier.'"

"O joy!" laughed David, while Sinker slapped Candy Bob on the back in hearty approval.

"Might as well try ter pull a cat by th' tail as ter beat French inter his bean!" continued the latter, examining a long red scratch on one of his wrists suggestive that his comparison had grown out of the wisdom of experience. "Never knew him ter remember any date in history but that ole Columbus chestnut, 1492!"

"Say," David demanded, while working a tooth back and forth between a finger and thumb. "Either yer kids got a caramel or anythin' stickable? I gotter get this tooth out 'fore Monday or th' derned ole dentist's goin' ter yank it!"

"I'll tell yer what ter do," advised Sinker. "Tie a string 'round it, an' then tie th' other end ter a door-knob, an' then sit down in a chair an' wait 'till some one comes an' pulls th'—"

"Ump! not so yer'd notice it!" expostulated David. "Bet yer a mil—"

"I gotter better way'n that," cut in Candy Bob, squirming about on the anchor chain, and aching to be heard. "Tie a long string ter yore tooth, an' tie a rock on th' other end an' throw it over the ridge-pole of th' house!"

"Oh, sit still, sweetie!" David urged, pushing him hard up against the anchor flukes. "Isn't a lower tooth, anyhow! Yer wriggle so yer make me think of that stuff my Dad calls nervous puddin', th' kind of jelly they turn out of a mold an' wriggles an' shakes every time yer move it."

"Like Santa Claus in th' 'Night before Christmas,'" declared the learned Candy Bob.

The prattle continued until the boat drew alongside the wharf at the delightful old place that

Washington liked so well. One is inclined to the belief that the most heroic act of his eventful life was parting from the quieting and restful influence of this delightful old plantation that he might accept the Presidency of his country.

The boys sauntered along the gravel path with little let or hindrance, for it was in the days when but comparatively few tourists journeyed thither, and before the rigid restrictions necessary to preserve the sacred building and relics were imposed that they might not be carried away piecemeal by our American vandal curiosity seekers. No "trolley-cars"— save the term! — then broke the stillness of that peaceful land and linked the stately grounds with the Capitol city.

Slowly the trio, who were the only passengers dropped by the boat that morning, zigzagged their loitering way up the slope towards the Mansion house, stopping, in hushed awe, to gaze fearsomely in through the iron gratings at the last resting-place of Martha and George; the old darkey guardian, the while, nodding drowsily on a stool, quite unconscious that the boat was in.

For an hour or more the boys roamed about the garden and grounds before entering the house. Up the stairs to the little room in which the Fa-

ther of his country breathed his last, David led the way. About the old four-posted bed the three gathered in subdued awe. Finally Sinker, with a sidelong glance at Candy Bob, murmured, in a suppressed tone, "An' that's where George passed out jes' cause Martha wouldn't get up in th' night an' get him a hot-water bottle!"

"Honest, Sinker, was that what killed him?" questioned the excitable one, teeming with interest.

"Sure! He had a chill, an' a hot brick or sumpthin' might have saved him," was the answer.

"Gee, I didn't know that," Candy Bob exclaimed, his face a bit blanched. "Say, come on; let's get outter here; anyway, it's too spooky fer me," and he clattered down the narrow stairs and out on to the sunlit lawn.

Later, they returned to the house and were wandering about the great rooms down stairs.

"'Tain't very excitish, is it?" chaffed Candy Bob.

Contrary to David's supposed characteristics, he held a deep-seated affection for Mount Vernon with all its associations and traditions; it stirred a spirit of veneration in him that disclosed a

totally different outward aspect than customary with that nimble-witted person. He never missed an opportunity to visit the time-honored spot, and was always well content to absorb its delightful influences, and lay aside, for the nonce, his usual enterprising leadership. Thus the last remark brought a somewhat pained expression to his face, changing, however, to one of deep consideration and, again, to a look of decision that was potent with possibilities of trouble. He next cast a searching glance at Sinker, and looked meaningly at their companion.

The former, fully comprehending the other's intentions, remarked, "Let's start sumpthin' then!"

"That's what I say!" David agreed, looking about and taking stock of the prospects.

Soon he caught Sinker's eye, and gave him another meaning look, at the same time cautiously jerking one thumb over his shoulder towards a window at their back through which a guard was listlessly watching their movements. Thus cautioned, Sinker warily sauntered about and soon discovered the cause of his friend's gesture.

Over in one corner of the room, that they were now inspecting, was the fine old harpsichord that

Washington imported at a cost of over a thousand dollars for the use of little Nelly Custis, his stepdaughter, of whom he was so fond.

"Say, sweetie, how's yore collection of curios gettin' on?" David began, in a pioneering sort of way. "Got anythin' new lately?"

"Sure!" was the enthusiastic reply, and falling directly into the trap being set for him. "Snake-skin, sea-urchin shell, three—"

"O shucks! get 'em anywhere!" sneered David. "Thought yer had really an' truly curios!"

"Well, I have, haven't I?" fumed the injured one. "A bullet from th' Crater at Petersburg, an—"

"Oh, anybody can buy one of 'em down there, 'Sides, I heard they make heaps of 'em jes' purpose ter sell ter Yankees!" helped out Sinker, with measureless contempt in his voice.

"Say, don't you kids think I'm expert 'nough ter know th' difference?" demanded Candy Bob, jumping about in great heat.

"Well, I 'spose yer can! Didn't think of that," was David's calming answer, fearing that their would-be victim, in his fitful movements, would discover the guard outside. "But here's

a chance ter get a first-class curio like what no one else's got or ever will!"

The other was all attention now and keen to hear more; worked up to just the sharp edge of curiosity and desire that David hoped. "What is it, Dave? don't keep a feller waitin'! Why don't yer tell me? We haven't got all day!"

"That's so!" was the ready agreement. "Sh — see that ole piano-looking thing over there in th' corner?"

"Course I do! Think I'm blind?" chaffed Candy Bob.

"Well," continued his tormentor. "I'll bet yer a million dollars, if I collected curios, I'd go in fer only good things like th' top of one of 'em piano keys over there?"

"Bet yer wouldn't! Yer wouldn't dare!"

"Hump! Come on, Sinker. The dear child hasn't got 'nough sand ter crack a soft-boiled egg!" jeered David, making as if to leave the room.

"You shut up!" exploded the gullible boy, surveying his tormentors with hostility. "Guess I've got as much nerve as you two milksops!"

"Prove it then!" Sinker sneered, with a provoking shrug of his shoulders. "Bet yer Sue

Baxter'd had that little ole piece of ivory th' second yer'd spoken of it!"

"Why don't yer get it yoreself if yer want it so bad?" Candy Bob fumed, under the other's mocking smile.

Sinker turned towards the door with an air of ineffable contempt, while David, in a semi-confidential tone, urged, more pacifically, "Go to it, Sweetie, an' show that Dixie lad what kind of stuff yer got in yer! Don't let him tell all over school that yer haven't got any backbone! you're full of it!"

Thus intimidated, Candy Bob faltered, "You jes' watch! I'll show him!" But there was a look of dumb horror on the face of the timid youth as he made two or three ineffectual starts before he finally dashed to the historical old instrument and frantically plucked away at the top of one of the keys.

Ill-fated success was not long in crowning his efforts. One of the little thin pieces of ivory was wrenched from its fastening; the impulse given it, by the impetuous boy, sent it flying nearly across the room, where it rattled to the floor. Turning, in a hasty effort, to recover the unlucky prize, his horrified vision took in the now

desperate situation: The guard, who, up to that moment, had been so listlessly watching the three boys from the veranda, became, of a sudden, fully alert as he witnessed the proceedings just related. Leaning through the open window, with countenance reflecting reverential awe at such sacrilegious looting, he bellowed, "Here, you little pirate, don't you move till I get in there!"

Candy Bob, petrified with terror, would have remained rooted to the spot from sheer physical inability to do otherwise. But David, inwardly chuckling with great glee at the excellent progress of their insidious plans, grasped Candy Bob by the arm and pulled him towards the window with the admonition, "Hustle now! Climb through there fer all you're worth, while th' ole bloke is goin' round, an' then beat it fer th' river!"

Without the aid of his two crafty friends, Candy Bob would have certainly fallen into the clutches of the aggrieved guardian of the cherished relics. In a most unceremonious manner, the hapless boy was bundled through the window, chattering with fear and limp as a wet rag during the process of ejection.

His lack of any effort at self-preservation,

however, nearly frustrated the rather late good intentions in his behalf, for even the little amount of time, so lost, was sufficient to allow the guard to enter the room and gain the window as the right leg of the hapless collector was disappearing over the sill. The other boys had caused their friend's calamitous exit by the simple process of pushing him head first, like a bag of grain, through the opening, and, like a bag of grain, he followed the natural course of gravity and slid down to the veranda, a helpless mass of humanity. He would have done so, at least, had not the vengeful hand of the guard caught him by one ankle at this critical juncture.

"I've got yer, ye little thief. I'll teach yer to —!"

But it will never be known what were the summary intentions in the line of teaching, for a sudden change in his sentiments was expressed by his angrily blazing forth, "Thunderation, lift that window quick!"

The instant David perceived the unfortunate situation into which his duplicity had plunged their friend, he pushed in the old-fashioned fastening that held the raised window in position, and down it crashed on the guard's wrist.

"I'VE GOT YER, YE LITTLE THIEF. I'LL TEACH YER TO ——!"
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"Now run fer it!" David cried as he rushed for the door. Outside, they found Candy Bob once more on his feet, hopeful with returning courage, but still clearly needing guidance. Taking him in tow, the three scurried down over the broad slope towards the river.

"Wh-ere we go — in' ter?" chattered Candy Bob, in a ferment of fear.

"Inter th' ole ice-house," was the confident response. "Hoof it now, sweetie, 'fore that goat gets a look at us!"

In another instant, the hard-pressed scamps tumbled riotously into the seclusion of the tomb-like structure that, tradition tells us, was once used as the Washington ice-house.

A moment later, between clouds of smoke, the product of two stubby pieces of rattan — a new source of supply had lately been discovered — each poised dexterously by Sinker and David, twixt two fingers, the latter quietly observed:

"Say, that dog of mine is th' knowingest thing that ever stood on four legs! I'm goin' ter write his biology."

Candy Bob viewed in open-mouthed amazement this state of calmness so opposed to their recent troubles. That timorous person was shaking

with the nervous after effects of his fright. Every effort to imitate his friends in the pleasure of smoking had proved fruitless, for his shaking hands were unable to keep match and rattan in friendly contact long enough to secure the longed-for light.

"What's a biology?" Sinker demanded, in unmixed scorn.

"Oh,— he means bi — og — raphy," hesitated Candy Bob, with returning confidence.

"Well, what's that?" the other insisted.

"Dave's goin' ter write th' life of Alfred, jes' like yer'd write th' life of George Washington." There was an appreciative grin on the boy's face now.

"Well I'll be dog-goned!" Sinker blurted out. "I reckon ole Lawrence'd like ter write a chapter or two about that beast."

"An' I'd like ter put in sumpthin' 'bout his bark soundin' like a duck's quack," the erstwhile victim put in, evidently much pleased with any chance to even up the score.

David's nose went up in the air as he listened in silent contempt to this display of so benighted a lack of taste.

"Yer sure goin' home ter-morrer, Dave?" questioned Sinker, in a wistful tone, on the return trip up the Potomac.

"Yep, th' Lawrences won't stand fer Alfred an' th' rest of us kids any longer," was the half-jocular reply. "If it wa'n't fer leavin' you fellers, though, I'd be blamed glad ter go, but you're comin' up fer a long visit, Sinker, don't ferget that! I wish yore folks would let you come, too!" turning to Candy Bob.

CHAPTER XIV

AN OLD FRIEND

"HELLO, Dave!"

"Hello, Chick!"

"When d'jer get home?"

"Last night," David replied, as he slowly unrolled the clinging paper about a long stick of candy displaying the highly artistic color decorations of a barber-pole. The paper proved to be of the adhesive kind; here and there small patches clung persistently; these were slowly and toothsomely removed by the lingering manipulation of David's tongue.

Chick watched this indolent, mouth-watering process with an air of hopeful anticipation. After the deft removal of the last remnant of tissue, his companion, whose gaze, when his succulent employment permitted, had been solemnly resting on Chick's wistful face, observed, tantalizingly, "This is jes' lumptious."

Chick held his peace, for long experience had taught him that David would ultimately "go snacks." In truth, he soon did arrive at that more charitable state of mind. With one end of the sugary mess held fast in his own mouth, although rapidly melting away to the point of submersion, he indistinctly articulated, "Here, catch on! I'm havin' a suck off this end, you suck on the other; you can suck down to that mark," touching with his forefinger a chipped place in the candy, and fairly enough half-way. "Maybe yer won't like it," continued the host, hopefully; "got cinnamon in it, an' bites."

The articulation was evidently distinct enough for Chick's ears. He promptly coupled on to the free end, and audibly went to work. "Tain't so bitie," he presently grunted, as he paused to operate the exhaust on his expanded lungs.

Why they did not break the stick in halves and each go his own gait is not related.

For some time, nothing was heard above the many and various sounds incident to the task in hand, including, more prominently, frequent hurried exhalations of breath preparatory to renewed suction, until Chick, working his end of the shortening stick of candy over into one corner of

his mouth, very incoherently observed, "Let's see who can keep their mouth th' cleanest."

"Sure," gasped the other half of the Siamese combination. And then, after a brief pause, "Say, d'jer 'spose we taste as good ter cannibals as this does ter us?"

Chick loosened his grip sufficiently to give a negative shake of his head.

It was not long before their progress brought them nose to nose, and rubbing hard, after which the transaction was closed by "doing turns."

The process now regretfully being ended, David remarked, "It tastes good, but it's kind of unfilling; come on down ter th' store, an' let's get a lot of feed, an' cook it out in O. H. W. Club," as, with an arm about his chum's shoulders, he urged him along the sidewalk. "My mouth tastes like a dump-heap eatin' all that stylish grub in Washington," he continued. "I ordered ham an' eggs every meal on th' way home, an' that's th' only thing that tasted good. We'll get some real food now — none of yer salads an' such ding-busted stuff."

Even at the risk of breaking a most sacred confidence, we feel it our duty to digress a moment in order to whisper to the reader that the mystic

letters denoting the name of the Club to be favored by this triumph in cookery, stand for "Only Horses Work,"— with the emphasis on the equine part. These two members, at least, endeavored faithfully to live up to the precept suggested, although during the erection of the one-room shack, the domicile of the club, they, and the half-dozen or so other restless souls comprising its membership, had, for the time being, forgotten this implied prohibition of labor.

But to return to the two leading members with whose acquaintance we have thus far been honored:

"Haven't got any money," dolefully muttered David's chum, hanging back.

"Shucks! That don't count. I've got dead loads of it. When we stopped off with Father at Washington, on th' way home, he gimme a dollar 'cause I got bit by a dog th' last week I was there, an' had ter stay in most th' hull dern time."

Visions of the delectable feast obtainable with this vast sum of ready money had the effect of dispelling all further reluctance on the part of Chick, and away they went in happy companionship, as he inquired:

"Did yer get bit, sure enough? Was he mad?"

"Sure, I did, right in th' shoulder, an' I bled terrible; bled two towels full, an' two handkerchiefs full, an' mother's best shirt-waist full," related David with a fair measure of pride.

"But was he mad?" the other persisted, with a look of terrified expectancy.

"Naw! just a fool dog," was the consoling response. "I was out in th' yard settin' a steel trap fer a rat, when th' nasty old cur come smellin' round, an' jes' 'cause I sprung th' trap on ter th' old butter-in's tail, he turned round an' bit me. But I'll bet he ran more'n fifty-nine miles before he stopped howlin' an' got that trap off. I hope he's runnin' round th' world; he's got my trap."

"What we goin' ter buy, Dave?" Chick inquired, with an easy sense of partnership. "Let's get sumpthin' tastable."

"Course!" David readily agreed. "Some frosted cake, an' some—"

"Look here," broke in Chick, "th' frostin'd taste pretty good 'thout th' cake; can't we buy it cheaper that way?"

"Dunno; never tried," was the doubtful reply. "We can get some chewable candy, anyway, an'

some bananas, an' a pie, an' a whole lot of things like that. An' then we gotter have sumpthin' ter cook. I can get some bread ter toast at home an' some butter, but cook says she can't spare any eggs, so we gotter buy some."

After much discussion and bargaining, they made their purchases at a little near-by corner store, remote from the business center of the city. Only a single penny remained in the partnership till when they were about to leave. But David returned to the counter, where, examining a display of red apples, he inquired, with an air of great affluence, "Say, mister, how much are those a barrel?"

Business was none too brisk at the corner store that season, consequently, there was an oversupply of that kind of last-year's fruit in the cellar, thus a chance to do a wholesale business, such as this promised to be, was not to be treated lightly. So, with a cheerful and ingratiating manner, the storekeeper replied, "Well, now, that's th' way ter do business. There ain't no better Bald'ins than them in town, an' I'll sell 'em to ye fer two dollars, an' wheel 'em over ter yore house myself."

"Cheap enough; gimme a cent's worth of that,"

promptly returned his youthful customer, throwing down the remaining penny as he clutched a stick of highly colored candy twisted into corkscrew curls, and scampered out of the door, leaving his mute and disappointed victim gazing after, while sadly moralizing on the fickleness of youth.

On the contrary, Chick smiled approvingly at this little sally on the part of his friend.

They collected all their purchases out on the narrow, old-time veranda running across the front of the store. Before apportioning their loads, Chick proposed, "Let's each have a piece of that suckie candy ter work on while we go 'long."

So they trudged homeward laden with a goodly assortment of small bags and packages.

"Where d'ye get them swell clothes?" questioned David, noticing, for the first time, the other's rather conspicuous new suit. As he asked the question, he worked his overladen mouthful of sweets over into one cheek, puffing it out like a sand-blister on an automobile tire.

"Oh! I aren't goin' ter keep 'em. Father promised 'em ter me fer a Christmas present, an' now summer's 'most come, he's had 'em sent up from Boston, but Mother says they're too loud,

an' she's goin' ter send 'em back." His face reflected his disappointment at the thought of this direful prospect.

"Christmas present!" snorted David. "I don't call clothes Christmas presents! What yer got 'em on fer, anyway, if yer aren't going ter keep 'em?"

Chick's face took on an expression of some embarrassment as he hesitatingly replied, "I kind of liked th' suit, an' jes' thought I'd wear it once; maybe I'd get a spot on it an' have ter keep it. No! Mother don't know," as his companion gave an inquiring glance that seemed to call for the last part of his explanation.

"Huh! I don't like 'em any too much; guess they'll do, though, fer this ole place."

It is suspected that David was leading up to a question that would give him room for discourse on the subject of his recent travels, but no inquiries of such nature were forthcoming. Instead, Chick rather excitedly declared that his bag of eggs, nine in number — their last purchase, and all that could be wheedled out of the storekeeper with their depleted treasury — was in imminent danger of taking the first step in the preparation of their promised omelet, for the

treacherous paper receptacle displayed a lengthening tear, as it jostled about dangerously insecure amid Chick's assorted freight.

David hastened to deposit his own packages on the curb, and lent his assistance, for the omelet was to be their master effort in the culinary line. Possibly, as further proof of the truth of the old pessimistic saying that "their eyes were bigger than their stomachs," nine eggs seemed none too many for the expected feast. He took the bag, and gazed reflectively at his friend, then suggested, "Put 'em in yore pockets; we haven't got far ter go."

"All right, you go ahead an' do it, my hands are too full."

David stowed away the eggs — two in each of Chick's side coat pockets; one in each inside pocket; and the rest in his trousers pockets; rather dangerously consorting with the usual mixed assortment of nails, knives, and the like, always to be found in pockets of properly pedigreed boys of this age. Progress was once more resumed toward the O. H. W. Club.

David could no longer suppress the narration of his exciting experiences on shipboard, so he led off with, "Like ter got hung ter death comin'

up on th' boat," with an air of much unconcern, as if such fearsome events had been but trifles in his winter's experience.

"Gosh! how'd it happen?" questioned his chum in wide-eyed admiration.

"O well, 'twa'n't much; jes' me an' some other fellars had ter help save th' old tub in a big storm, an' th' cap'n didn't like it. Yer see, he wa'n't much good, but he got th' drop on us, an' would have hung us fer mutiny if we hadn't barricaded ourselves in th' cabin an' stood him off. Say, jes' feel that right arm of mine! Some muscle that!"

They had reached David's yard by this time, and deposited their loads on an old well-curb, preliminary to a raid on the kitchen.

"Oh, I dunno," Chick answered in a guarded tone. "Some strong myself! Anyhow, my father's stronger'n your'n."

"Whew!" whistled David incredulously.

"Bet yer life he is; my father can take yore father, an' throw him over his head," boasted Chick with fine bravado.

"Pooh! that's nothin'," loftily returned his friend. "My father can lift yore house."

"Guess yer don't know what my father does

fer exercise every mornin' 'fore breakfast, do yer?" was Chick's taunting query.

"Dunno as I do; guess 'tisn't much 'cordin' to th' way yer mother has ter holler ter get him outter bed every time I sleep at yore house; I'll bet he hasn't never got up first since I been on earth," was David's rather staggering rejoinder.

There was a moment's pause, but Chick was not to be daunted. "Oh, he's different now, yer've been away all winter an' don't know what's been goin' on. Father, he jumps right outter bed every mornin', rain or shine, 'fore mother's awake, an' runs down-town, an' lifts th' State House right off th' ground, six times, sometimes a dozen times, jes' ter get up an app'tite fer breakfast." Chick was working his right forearm back and forth, while his left hand appreciatingly fondled the swelling and subsiding muscle in the upper part.

David appeared quite unconcerned, as he picked up a stone and shied it at a passing dog.

"Guess yore father hasn't got nothin' on mine fer strength," persisted his friend, with an air of victory.

"Huh! I didn't want ter hurt yer feelin's," began David, in a hesitating sort of way, "but

Father wouldn't stand fer me not ter stand up fer him, so I might jes' as well tell yer that when we stopped off in Washington, that th' President wanted th' Capitol — that's twenty times bigger'n th' little old dry-goods box of a State House here — he wanted it turned 'round 'cause it didn't face th' right way, an' Father he jes' took it in his hands an' turned it right 'round with all them Congress people in it, too, an' th' President sittin' right in his throne on th' front veranda lookin' on, praisin' Father all th' time. Saved 'em millions of dollars, an' I was right there an' saw th' hull thing."

Chick gasped in envy at this marvelous effort of the other's creative brain; gasped, stammered, dug the toe of his shoe in the ground, and, with a scowl, appeared to give up the contest. He knew of no building larger than the National Capitol, so familiar to him in his pictured geography. He grew angry to think that he had not skipped the local affair, and gone straight to Washington when the chance had offered to close the argument. But it was too late now, and he fumed at his witless defeat; his chum's marked air of patronage maddened him. With a sudden rush, he kicked at David's shin, as he shouted

wrathfully, "I'll show you right now who's th' strongest."

The battle was on. David dodged the heavy-toed shoe to the extent of only receiving a glancing blow, but it removed a trifle of the cuticle, and deeply stirred the sufferer's ire.

The two boys clinched at once — biting, scratching, kicking; every means of damaging one another was shamelessly used without hesitation or resentment. A torrential rain had fallen earlier in the day and a stream of muddy water — the broad distant levels of a highly fertilized vegetable garden formed the rich alluvial source of the chocolate-hued current — was flowing down the little natural valley between the two houses, for, be it known, this sanguinary conflict was waged on the frontier line betwixt the boys' homes.

In their disfiguring warfare, rushing upon their own destruction, they were quickly brought to earth by the treacherous mud. Over and over they rolled until they brought up in the unsavory flood with Chick on top, who lost not the opportunity to rub his antagonist's head in the muddy broth. David, spitting and sputtering, his ears and nose filled with the murky liquid, his eyes

blinded with it, gave a maddened yell of wild protest, as, in total disregard of recognized principles of pugilistic warfare, he brought all his batteries of offense into play. Still Chick held him fast in the slimy brew. But now the hard-beset youngster became most painfully conscious — as much through taste as by means of his somewhat befogged eyesight — of numerous rivulets of a yellowish, pasty fluid oozing from Chick's pockets, to the further damage of the garments of both parties to the conflict. With futile fury, David felt his thick hair becoming coagulated in a glutinous stream, its source being an inside pocket of Chick's coat. To add further fuel to his rage, another similar stream persistently discharged itself from Chick's side-pocket, about David's Adam's apple, and thence vanished to unseen regions among his nether garments. There were several other equally albuminous and yolky rills of stickiness issuing from Chick's clothes, meandering hither and yon, yet to be accounted for. However, let it suffice that each did its destined part thoroughly and well.

That youth's hope that his suit might get spotted was being fulfilled.

The situation now reached a point beyond David's continued endurance. Gathering himself for a supreme effort, he wound his legs about his tormentor and heaved him over. As a prelude to this move he took toll of an adjacent ear by means of a bite on its over-large lobe; the sudden pain threw Chick off his guard. On they rolled, this time towards the old-fashioned high-posted fence that separated David's yard from the street. The battle had become sanguinary; the garments of each little egg-splotched barbarian were sodden and torn. Their faces were scratched and bleeding, yet the two young demons abated not one second in their furious onslaughts. It looked as if the affair might end in a draw, as had so many similar frays in the past, unless some one should intervene, although this might result regrettably for the person possessing so much temerity.

But no! David was nursing a bit of strategy which promised quick and certain victory. The plan gave him great comfort, so he continued to encourage the rolling in the direction of the street. That morning, while, in pursuance of duty, chasing a stray cat through the fence, he had observed that one of the great, hollow, box-like posts con-

cealed a swarm of bees, passing industriously in and out of a knot-hole near the bottom.

Towards this post, with unerring aim, he guided his sticky fellow contortionist, the two heads closely locked together — aye, and glued together, one might almost assert, because of the coating of raw eggs besmirching their faces. Up against the post, with one final effort, David banged the other's head, while he fearsomely jerked his own away, and thrust it out between the pickets, buoyed up by breathless trust in what was to come.

This last move on the part of the strategist was merely an extra precaution, for had not David heard from days of his earliest understanding that one had but to hold his breath, with grim determination, as a certain foil against bites of all stinging insects?

Let us draw the veil; we have nowhere met with adequate language to do justice to what followed; no words can fairly convey the sudden charge of the torrent of revengeful busybodies that surged out of the old knot-hole, and quickly and certainly inserted their poisoned swords, lances, and spears into the offending heap at their front portal. This, most unhappily for its pos-

sessor, was none other than Chick's hatless, close-cropped, war-stained pate. Yowls, howls, screams and death-curdling yells volleyed from the now thoroughly chastened pugilist, who had unwittingly rapped for admission at the honey factory. All thoughts of his recent enemy vanished from poor Chick's mind as this tidal wave of trouble engulfed him. He covered his face with his hands — and so provided new material for the steam-drillers — frantically scrambled to his feet, and fled homeward, his cup filled to overflowing, his flight attended and augmented by the driving power in the pursuing horde, each angry warrior seizing every remnant of a chance to continue the punishment.

David was ready to make his own escape in the second when Chick, because of the expected flank attack, should release his hold. But the strategist by no means retreated unscathed; legion was the number of hardy scouts that detected him and very satisfactory execution did they perform. Even the coating of mud with which he was liberally provided — that old sovereign remedy formerly believed infallible when applied to stinging wounds — singularly failed in this instance.

Out of these confused events, one indisputable

fact emerges: David's faith in breath-holding was sadly shattered. During many a humdrum interval in days to come, he revengefully sought to recall the name of the miscreant who led him into this frightful error. For the peace of mind of such individual, we are glad to say that David's memory utterly failed him.

As he angrily rattled the latch, and burst through the century-old kitchen door of his father's house, slamming it vehemently betwixt himself and the avenging pests, and remorsefully sought parental aid in this hour of his tribulation, his indescribable appearance, might, to say the least, properly remind one of Mr. Pickwick's "unsoaped from Ipswich (who) brought up the rear."

Yet, David bore his recent antagonist no ill-will — and the same may be passed to the credit of Chick. Such passages at arms, and the following quick resumptions of peace, commonly had been too near unto a daily practice to leave these companions long at variance. And, besides, the late affair, from the standpoint of the ethics of juvenile warfare, had been very well conducted, in the main.

CHAPTER XV

AN EXCITING NIGHT

It was eight o'clock — a full hour before David's prescribed bedtime. That somber young gentleman had astonished as well as cast a gloom over the usual buoyant spirits of Nancy Packard, Roulette, and even Chick, by trudging dutifully off to bed for two nights, at the unseemly hour of eight.

This upsetting of one of the most sacred canons of childhood was an unforgivable crime from the standpoint of David's followers, and was unexplainable so far as any light on the subject could be gained from the deserter. The usual last hour, full of riotous games and mischief, had changed into a dull and listless affair.

This second evening of his early retirement found him, as on the previous one, sitting propped up in bed, a huge pillow at his back, industriously, but not understandingly, reading from the Book of Genesis. The door leading into the large hall

was closed. As a safeguard against inquisitive intruders — there being no key — it was held more securely in place by the simple device of forcing the back of a chair under the latch.

David's mother had offered him ten dollars to read the Bible through.

This seemed a mighty sum to David, and he figured that he could do the task within a time not too exhausting by tackling it an hour each night. Although the progress made the first night was a trifle discouraging, yet he reasoned that he could go faster as he "got on ter th' thing an' got th' hang of th' derned ole names."

It never occurred to David to skim or skip — nothing like that was in his make-up. He had plenty of shortcomings, but that was not one of them; he always played fair and knew not how to cheat, except in the spirit of mischief.

On this second night, all went well enough with David's devotional work for a half-hour or so; even if we consider the constant digging of his knuckles into the brown curly head for a better understanding of the not over-exciting contents of the great family Bible resting on the pinnacle of his bended knees.

For some time, a lively indignation-meeting

had been in progress down-stairs in the kitchen end of the house. These last few remarks, which we quote below, fairly well depict the high tension of those foregathered there.

"Well, I don't know what's got inter him. Search me!" Chick declared, thorough disgust expressed in every word and feature.

"If dat wu'thless li'l' debbil's gwine ter lebe us an' shet himself up lak a possum in a hole, I's gwine back ter th' Island, dat's what's dis yere chile'l do, sho's you bo'n," Roulette avowed, equally aggrieved and puzzled.

Nancy Packard was about to give expression to her sentiments of resentment, when old Hannah — the family cook during years of service — came along on the way to one of the large store-rooms with which the old homestead abounded. Detecting trouble in the voices, she came to an abrupt stop and scanned them anxiously as she questioned:

"Phwat's troublin' yez, I'd loike ter be knowin'?"

"Well, I've been over here two nights now," Chick sputtered, "and that dern kid's gone off ter bed both nights over an' hour 'fore bedtime. Aren't that th' blamedest! Who ever heard of

anythin' but a crazy kid goin' ter bed 'till he had ter?"

Old Hannah gazed at him in deep amusement before replying with the query, "Don't yez know what ut is th' dear chile's doin'?"

"Course not, it's a regular mystery, an' dern mean of him, too!" Chick returned.

"He's readin' of th' Bible through for th' ten big dollars his mother's ter give him. It's a good thing, too, it is, there'd be a sight more peace 'bout here if th' bye'd read it all th' toime." With this, the old cook flounced along about her work.

"Gosh, jes' lissen ter that!" Chick exploded, his face expressing the utmost astonishment.

Nancy Packard sent out a peal of laughter as she proposed, "Come on, let's go up to his door an' encourage him in his good work."

They did with a vengeance! Creeping silently to a point of vantage, they carefully tried the latch; it held fast. They gazed at one another in search of an inspiration.

"Lemme at it!" Roulette whispered. "I'd pow'ful well like ter ketch up wid dat good-fur-nuffin chile fur makin' an Albino lady out ob me."

The others gave way while Roulette tried the door a little more earnestly. She worked away until the latch lifted, then, pushing hard, the door seemed to give a little. Moving back to the opposite side of the hall, and lowering her head like a butting-goat, she plunged head first against the offending barrier. The wooden floor within afforded too little hold for the chair-legs against any such battering-ram assault as this, with the consequences that the door flew open with a bang while Roulette sprawled half across the room embracing the chair in a tangle of legs and skirts.

Screams of delight, at this amazing success, arose from the hall, followed by the convulsed faces of Chick and Nancy Packard peering through the opening at the astonished and angry Biblical student, who, with the huge volume raised over his head, his feet touching the floor preparatory to taking the offensive, glared at them in righteous indignation.

"Goin' ter teach Sunday school?" Chick sang out, with irritating sarcasm.

Roulette's bump of caution, when it came to waging warfare with David, had suddenly warned her that the vicinity was getting dangerous. As she hastily untangled herself from the

chair, and slipped out into the hall, she shot back, "I's gwine ter write ole Missus Lawrence 'bout de angel chile yer is an'—"

But she got no further. There was a sudden panicky rush by the other despoilers of good intentions as they sought to evade David's onslaught. Chick slammed the door, and thus they gained a saving grace. And it was well so, for, upon reaching the foot of the stairs, the ponderous family relic landed at their heels with a great bang and burst into shreds.

Some five minutes later, David, dressed as usual, sauntered into their midst, observing, with a somewhat sheepish look, "If any of you kids want ter earn ten dollars yer can have my job."

How David did work in the garden and earned the wherewithal to rebind the precious family Bible need not be mentioned here.

But our hero squared his account with Roulette that very night — if it may be said that there were anything due.

It was about the hour of midnight. All was quiet throughout the old rambling house; the numerous family was peacefully wrapped in slumber. Out into the stillness of the night, first one church tower and then another sent a feverish,

clanging summons to the sleeping inhabitants that they should hastily arise and give timely aid. Cries of "Fire!" were added to the tumult, as each white-faced man and elated youth anxiously asked, "Where is it?"

After the usual brief space of uncertainty and confusion, always attending an alarm of fire in those more primitive days, gave way to a more orderly knowledge of affairs, each street poured its share of willing helpers and children — the latter reveling in the thrill of excitement — in the general direction of the historic old North Church, now on fire after many years of vicissitude. It was but a few hundred feet from the Hamilton house.

All the younger members of that household were dancing with excitement, because — we hesitate to say it — of so welcome a riotous state of affairs in their neighborhood. There was a slight alloy of fear, notwithstanding, at the prospect that the fire might be too near for safety. And so it turned out.

Nevertheless, this baneful possibility did not prevent them, one and all, from diving out into the night the moment they had donned a rather hasty assortment of clothes. In truth, David

put on most of his finishing touches as he darted out to find Chick, who, not less alert, was already coming in the same eager quest of his friend.

"Come on, it's th' ole North Church!" he shouted, leading the way at top speed.

Once in the street, they mingled with a fast-growing multitude of excited pedestrians; a fire-engine or two; hose-reels drawn by long lines of men tugging at ropes, breathing hard from their unwonted exertions; other reels hitched to the rear of market-wagons; and all the motley rush and confusion of those volunteer fire-department days.

The boys attached themselves to one of the hand-drawn reels, and rapidly spent their strength in frantic efforts to pull the entire load. It was well for their endurance that the distance was so short.

In the confusion of the unwinding hose, buzzing off the fast whirring reels and stretching along the ground like great anacondas, both the boys had their feet swept from under them more than once. However, these happenings seemed to hurt them rather more mentally than physically. The friendly jibes invoked from all sides did not greatly elevate their pride.

When the hose connections were made, and the panting engines at last sent their arching streams on their errand of deliverance the boys sought other outlets for their restless activity.

David's rapid scanning of the surroundings brought to his attention a stable-door directly across the side street from the church; this occupied a corner lot.

"Come on, Chick!" he called out. "Gotter save ole Lunt's horse! Stable'll be on fire'n no time!"

Running to the door, they found it unlocked. Sparks were scurrying wildly about, many sucking in with the draught as the boys rolled the broad door open just long enough for them to slip through into the building. They industriously stamped the fire out, and turned their attention to the feeble, old horse, neighing and pawing in his stall. The glare through the windows lighted the interior with the brightness of day. The impatient animal was quickly urged towards the door preliminary to being led into the street.

"Be ready ter open th' door, Chick, th' minute I say th' word," David directed, in an imperative

tone, beginning to mount the beast, and thus make a more spectacular exit.

Chick had not anticipated this method of departure, and so, perhaps, there was a bit of malice in his somewhat querulous answer:

"No use, yer can't do it, Dave," opening the door a crack and peeping through. "Regular furnace of sparks outside! Air's full of 'em, jes' like a million snap-crackers on Fourth o' July. All blow in an' burn th' ole barn down in a second!" He rolled the door tightly closed with a great display of concern, as he finished speaking.

"Well, gosh!" David returned in great consternation. "Gotter do sumpthin' orful quick."

He was on the horse by this time, with the loose end of the halter knotted in such a fashion as to provide a fair substitute for reins. Looking around the stable, he espied a door leading into a shed that connected with the kitchen end of the Lunt house.

"Open that door in th' corner, quick!" he shouted.

Chick saw no way other than to do as he was bid, but relieved his feelings by declaring, "Say,

yer dern chump, what d'yer take me fer, a hos'ler?"

He threw open the door with a bang, and led the way through the shed, pompously followed by David, riding the old raw-boned animal, like Don Quixote into the affair with the windmills.

The whole heavens were ablaze by now, diffusing sufficient light through the old shed for the passage of the rescue party.

The procession moved on to the door that gave entrance to the kitchen. Still riddling his chum with the burden of his discontent, that door was also opened by Chick for the entrance of the "marvelous equine paradox," as David had already loudly proclaimed it, having borrowed the term from his last circus.

Into the kitchen they moved, and thence to the dining-room, where old Mr. Lunt was testily engaged in collecting the family silver ready for a sudden removal.

At first, mute with astonishment, as he was confronted with this most unexpected apparition, he ceased his labors, petrified in voice and limb at sight of this astonishing visitation. Then he broke into a veritable inferno of wrath as he heaped a terrific torrent of abuse upon this young

"protective association." "Stop, you little villains!" he thundered. "Thieves! Robbers! Taking advantage of the fire to steal my horse! I know you, you young vagabonds! the same two rascals that pulled my door-bell out by the roots last week. Scalawags! Miscreants! Little vipers!—"

But the boys had gone; down the main hall and out the front door they flashed like a gleam of light, the terrified and half-starved horse left to keep Mr. Lunt company in his lonely dining-room.

By good fortune, the house did not burn, although it received a severe scorching. When the firemen decided that the beloved old church was doomed to destruction, they turned their attentions to the preservation of the threatened buildings near by.

While we have given over-much space and consumed considerable time in detailing this last escapade of our young friends, affairs, by no means, had moved so slowly with them. Scarcely five minutes elapsed from the moment they conceived it their appointed duty to rescue the Lunt horse from probable cremation until their ignominious retreat from the unwholesome

atmosphere of the old man's presence. In consequence, conditions attending the fire had not greatly changed. It was still making slow but sure progress along the roof of the old church in the direction of the high steeple.

Once more David and Chick were looking for new adventures.

"Let's help ole Myra Tibbetts save her furniture!" eagerly proposed Chick, now more peacefully inclined toward his companion since the latter's recent humiliating failure to "put one over on him," as he expressed it under his breath. "See 'em luggin' all that truck out th' door; maybe we could get even with her fer tellin' my mother that we worked a tick-tack on her winder last week; the ole tattle-tale!"

"Good, I'm on!" David joyfully agreed.

Without more ado, he plunged recklessly into the somber front hall, its darkness not yet dispelled by the fire as it had not reached the front of the church towards the Tibbetts house.

When David shot through the doorway, he was some twenty feet ahead of his more fortunate partner who thus was saved the grievous experience that befell David. That young gentleman's impetuous rush carried him scarcely ten

feet within the broad hall when he received a stinging blow that drove all the breath out of his body. He had been caught squarely across the stomach by a huge trunk being swiftly borne by two sturdy men. Over this unexpected barrier the boy sprawled, flat on his stomach, trying industriously to regain his breath, his head hanging over the rear of the trunk and his feet kicking in a masterly effort to regain his footing on the slippery wooden floor.

In this humiliating posture David made his retreat with great dispatch. He was landed in the front yard to the accompaniment of heartburning expressions of dubious approval as to his embarrassing pose from numerous onlookers. Chick had deftly dodged the queer projectile on the steps, but failed not uproariously to give vent to keen relish of his chum's predicament by shouting: "Look at th' 'marvelous equine paradox' now! Ridin' some ter-night, aren't yer, Dave? How about it?"

"Well, I saved yer from it by goin' in first," David chillingly replied, as he dug his feet once more into mother earth and started to make his escape with, "Come on, let's get outer here an' go where's there's sumpthin' doin'."

"Gosh!" chuckled Chick, "I'd think there was nuff doin' on that trunk ter —"

"Oh, cut it out!" David wrathfully broke in, gritting his teeth in anger.

Their next attempt to be useful was spent in securing a short ladder by means of which they climbed to the roof of the one-story ell that was in danger from the sparks now beginning to shower the neighborhood. David, in his usual vigorous manner, was the first to mount, with Chick following close behind; each was armed with a broom furnished by the distressed woman to whom they had come to give doubtful succor. A little blaze had started up towards the ridge-pole, sending up a small column of smoke. From the top of the ladder, David wormed his way up the not very steep roof, and was about to attack the blaze when a man's head suddenly rose over the other side of the ridge. A flood of water struck David full in the face, as the newcomer heedlessly dashed the contents of a pail down in the direction of the smoke.

"You — dern — lub-ber!" fumed David, half-choked with water and wrath. "Aren't yer got any sense at —"

The head had disappeared, but Chick, who had

been mostly sheltered from this impromptu bath by the protecting form of his friend, had slipped to the foot of the ladder in noisy hysterics at this last lamentable plight of his chum.

"Of all th' doggoned bone-headed idiots!" growled David as he soused down the ladder, his shoes oozing little streams of water during his progress. "What yer laughin' at, yer blamed chump? It might jes' as well been you. All I've done ternight is jes' sacrifice myself ter save yer useless bones!" There was a comical look of despair on his face, at this brimming over of his cup of woe.

As Chick continued to roll with merriment and delight, it is probable that mortal combat would have begun at once had not some one near them exclaimed, "Say, the sparks are beginning to drop on the Hamilton house!"

All sense of resentment immediately vanished from David's mind. "Hurry, Chick!" he called, setting forth on the run. "Come on an' help!"

In another moment he reached home, but Chick had gone on to his own house, as he saw that there was also danger in that direction.

The heavens were now aglow with lurid light, as the large wooden structure fed itself to the

pitiless flames. Up the century-old steeple they licked their greedy way, and all about was a dazzling and ghastly glare.

Sparks were showering with increasing ferocity over the adjacent buildings, when Mrs. Hamilton summoned all to assist in averting the threatened catastrophe. To the immense span of roof, she sent a nephew — John Packard, grown to manhood; another of the numerous relatives to whom she gave shelter, a cousin of both Nancy Packard and David. Women, children, and servants were commanded to carry blankets and buckets of water to be passed through the open skylight for timely service on the roof. The blankets were hastily spread over the more exposed spots and quickly drenched with water. When everything of that nature was exhausted, the continuous procession of water-carriers furnished the means for wetting the roof elsewhere.

Mrs. Hamilton experienced great difficulty in holding David to his duty of passing the many pails and old leather fire-buckets, from hand to hand. Of these latter, there was a generous supply, handed down from earlier generations, and still carefully preserved; partly out of sentiment and partly for their emergency value. He

was frantic to help on the roof, but, at the time, all were needed in the line that was manning the buckets.

Roulette, with her frightened eyes popping out of her black face in the excitement of the moment, was exerting the strength of a giant and the agility of a cat as she covered the length of the attic stairs in the passing of each bucket. She handed her load to David, whose task it was, clinging to a ladder over the stairs, to deliver it through the skylight to the roof.

Each time, an empty bucket must needs find its way back by the reverse process.

A flaming brand carried far heavenward by the twisting vortex of heat, as the fire in the steeple gathered headway, fell whirling, ever and anon, upon the Hamilton roof. Such fearsome moments called for redoubled efforts upon the part of the little fire-brigade toiling so anxiously to save the old home.

Mrs. Hamilton was now on the roof taking charge, leaving the lower regions to the care of her sister, who had rushed from her own house, safely beyond the danger zone, to give assistance. It was when one of these brands, somewhat larger than common, fell near her, and set the tinder-

like shingles ablaze, that Mrs. Hamilton sent forth a most urgent appeal: "Hurry, children, the roof's on fire!" that David, in his added zest to obey, lost hold of his bucket of water. Beneath was Roulette struggling with one in each hand. The stairs had become slippery from the constant spilling and slopping from the buckets. David's lost load landed fairly on Roulette's head. Losing her own footing, and with the persistent companionship of three buckets and their drenching contents, she slid, rolled, and plunged the full length of the wooden stairway, fuming with rage at what she naturally supposed to be another of David's tricks. Choking and gasping for breath, having swallowed much liquid in an attempt to express her sentiments during her tumultuous descent, she was on the verge of making things warm for her supposed tormentor, having grasped him by the leg with dire intent, when Mrs. Hamilton's stern orders to return to duty quieted matters. Once more the water came along with tireless regularity, and in good season for its purpose.

Although Roulette's inclination to mutiny was held in check, so far as the exciting work in hand was concerned, she continued to give vent to her

wounded pride and rage in volleys of wrathful predictions as to what would happen to David the first opportune moment.

"Yer good-fer-nuffin' li'l' debbil! I'll learn yer ter trifle wid dis chile. I's a-gwine ter bre'k ebery bone in yo' scan'lous lil'l' body an' feed yer ter th' buzzards. Yer is goin' ter get ketched up wid, fer sho!"

"Oh, close yer face an' send that water faster, yer hoofless pickaninny!" was David's impatient rejoinder. "I didn't do it on purpose!"

"Man, don't yer be talkin'! Don't yer trifle wid me! If yer b'lieves yer can tote dese contraptions any faster dan —"

Her further sentiments were drowned in a convulsive spasm as another deluge of water smothered her upturned face.

Nothing but the most wholesome respect for Mrs. Hamilton prevented Roulette's coming into bodily conflict with her enemy after this last galling trial. What she failed in that way was not lacking in expression through the medium of words, however. She kept up an endless tirade against David, who gave but little heed while undergoing such a thrilling experience as the night afforded.

In much fear, Mrs. Hamilton viewed the great tower of flame, and questioned what might be their fate when it crashed to the ground, as certainly it must do. The sudden hail of sparks and burning fragments that would then overwhelm them might be more than they could master. After considering the situation for some moments, she sent word along the line for all the tubs and pans to be collected and passed up empty. These were placed on a part of the roof that was comparatively flat, and filled, from time to time, as the water could be spared. Then, much to his delight, she called David aloft and ordered the line moved along to close the gap. Other friends had arrived by this time so there were plenty to fill the ranks, and even move them nearer together. Thus the water came faster. The thoroughly discomfited and soaked Roulette had taken David's place at the skylight.

As the tower began to totter, the townspeople, so helplessly looking on, drew out of danger. It fell with a prodigious crash. Fortunately, the direction of its fall was into the wide, grass-bordered street, and not across any of the dwellings.

Myriads of sparks and flaming brands rained

down on the housetops, setting little fires here and there. For some minutes, those on the roofs were sore pressed to ward off a conflagration. The little band at the Hamilton house did yeoman service, even although Roulette experienced another Niagara when David slipped on the roof and sent the contents of one more bucket down the ladder.

"You jes' wait, yer li'l' scoun'rel. I's gw'ine ter skin yo' hide right off ob yo' back, that's what I is!" she gasped, between breaths.

As the danger became less acute, and only an occasional spark came their way, David crept to the end of the ridge-pole, and looked down into the yard to see if that architectural triumph, the edifice of the "O. H. W. Club," were unscorched. At the same time, he observed a stooping figure close to the house and directly beneath him. As his eyes became more used to the semi-obscurity, he discovered that the man was crowding a quantity of papers and shingles under the kitchen steps. He next struck a match, but the wind blew it out.

David waited no longer. He scrambled back to his cousin with the excited news. "Hurry, Jack, there's a man down at th' kitchen steps

settin' th' house afire. Yer catch him, an' I'll pour water on it from up here!"

John Packard was large and athletic, but he had a tough fight of it. David put out the growing blaze, and then became a fascinated spectator of the scuffle below.

After the first grip with the strange figure, Jack had his hands full. They swayed and struggled toward the rear of the house, where the main roof dropped off to a low one-story affair. David slid down to this latter, keeping pace with the antagonists as they tussled along. At the eaves of this low roof, David was but a few feet above their heads. He could see that Jack was having a hard time; the lean, lanky man had his long fingers gripped with vice-like energy about the other's throat. Jack was breathing hard.

David saw that something must be done at once. Judging his opportunity carefully, he jumped fiercely down on top of the enemy's head. The blow was a stunning one, and the effect confusing. In another instant, Jack had pitched the man onto his face with his hands firmly held behind him, while David ran for help.

It turned out that through his timely discovery

and intelligent action, besides saving his own home from destruction, David had brought about the capture of an escaped lunatic, who, after watching, with maniacal glee, the fearful effect of his madness upon the old North Church, had then sought the destruction of the whole community.

The public recognition afterwards given David for his conduct at that trying time, was the envy of all his friends, and, we fear, furnished a delectable opportunity for him to gloat over Roulette's aquatic trials and "general messiness," as he ruthlessly termed it, upon that same occasion.

CHAPTER XVI

WITHIN PRISON WALLS

"Hello, Dave!"

"Hello, Chick!"

"D'jer hear what yore mother said ter my mother yesterday!"

"Guess not, what was it, Dave?"

"Well, she met her on th' street an' lit inter her 'bout our fightin' so much."

"Oh, I dunno, guess we get 'long well 'nuff. Don't have more'n one fight a day, do we?" mused Chick in a solemn manner.

"Well, anyhow, yore mother thinks we don't do much of anythin' else but scrap, an' says it's all my fault," David grinned.

"O shucks! guess if they'd leave us 'lone we'd get 'long all right; always buttin' inter what's none of their blamed business."

"Never mind," David went on, his face a curious mixture of amusement and mystery. "Yore mother said she wished I'd keep my hands

off yore face 'long nuff fer 'em ter get a decent picture of yer; said they'd been tryin' ter get one fer over a month, but that I'd kep' yer beautiful features so clawed an' scratched up all the time that they hadn't looked fit ter photograph th' whole derned time." A prolonged chuckle followed this speech.

The scarred warrior laughed companionably as he replied, "Don't yer care, Dave! I'm some glad they couldn't! What d'jer 'spose I want any derned ole picture fer, anyway?"

During an interval in their newsy chatter, a neighbor, pushing a baby-carriage containing a very young specimen of humanity, came to a halt near where the boys were dangling their feet from their perches on top of the Hamilton fence.

"You boys haven't seen my dear little baby," declared the admiring mother, throwing back the top of the carriage for their privileged inspection.

"Yes'm. No'm. I m-mean we'd l-like ter," stammered the confused and embarrassed David to whom all babies were things to be avoided as a scourge. The two youths clambered awkwardly down from the fence, and stood in mute agony. Finally, the proud mother broke the spell by confidentially proposing, "Now each of you take a

good look and then tell me if it's not the most delicious little thing you ever saw in your whole lives!"

"Gosh, I don't see where th' delicious comes in," muttered David, under his breath, and then, in an aside, "Yore first, Chick; get onter yer job!"

Chick took a fleeting glimpse and expressed a very incoherent but extremely qualified assent to the claims of the happy parent.

David felt so chagrined at this dismal failure that he took it upon himself to right matters by showing some personal concern in the little pink and white affair over which so much rapture was being wasted. "What's her name?" he inquired with an obliging show of interest.

"It isn't a she! It's a he!" corrected the offended parent.

"I know it's a h-he," David stammered, "but what's her name?"

With one sweeping look of scorn she tilted the top of the carriage down over the face of the little tot, and wheeled it away, indignation pictured in every step at such incomprehensible ignorance.

"Well, I'll be derned!" announced the dis-

gusted David to the radiant Chick. "If I ever see a baby again a mile off I'll beat it fer th' woods!"

After this outbreak had spent itself, David inquired, with a knowing twinkle in his eyes, "How's yer headache?"

"Honest, Dave, it did ache some 'bout school time this noon; most all gone now, though. It's 'nuff ter bust a feller's head ter think he has ter go ter that derned ole school mornin' an' afternoon an' yer don't only have jes' one session!"

David shied a stone that he had held in readiness ever since first mounting the fence, and fetched a yelp from a dog belonging next door, that neither of the boys had any great cause to love.

"Good shot! Dave," approved Chick. "Wish yer'd killed him!"

The dog went howling home, creating such a disturbance that his two enemies deemed it expedient to beat a rapid retreat to the seclusion of the "O. H. W. Club."

From that secure hiding-place, they produced a supply of sweet-fern cigars — left-overs from last year's crop — and smoked contentedly for a spell.

Finally, Chick threw down his half-consumed cigar with a display of impatience while declaring, "Say, let's do sumpthin' sporty; we can't 'ford ter waste a whole afternoon outer school like this!"

"What'll we do then? I'm game."

Chick studied the outlook for a while, and then proposed that they go up to the old abandoned State Prison, but a few squares away. As Chick hopefully put it, "It's right next my school, an' maybe sumpthin' 'ud turn up fer us so's we could put one over on my snoopy ole teacher. 'Sides, we might give th' gang sumpthin' fer their money, too."

Some years before, a new site had been selected for the prison and the old, dismal stone buildings, with their eerie cells and dungeons, had become the frequent resort of all brave spirits in quest of adventure. Consider the hair-raising experience possible at night, in such a place, peopled with the ghosts of the many murderers who had paid the penalty — on the old scaffold — for their bloody crimes. It took a hardy youth, indeed, goaded on by many "dares," to trespass within that gloomy domain upon a dark night. A massive stone wall — twenty feet or more in

height — enclosed the grim buildings and the great yard in which they stood.

"Let's take 'long Father's ole revolver that was given him in honor of sumpthin' or other," David proposed. "Mother always takes it ter Washington with her ter scare burglars, but she leaves th' cartridges back here. Says it's safer." Then, laughing, as he continued, "We can get some target practice 'gainst that high wall, 'thout killin' any one.

"No, Mother wouldn't lemme have it if she knew!" he again ran on, in response to a look of inquiry in the other's eyes.

"Sure thing, then! Go an' get th' artillery. I'll wait. Only get a move on! feel as if I can't waste much more time."

Reaching the awesome institution, deserted and weird, David spied a large circular saw, somewhat lacking in teeth — the reason, probably, for its having been cast away. Viewing the saw in deep thought for a moment, he suddenly cried, "Gee! jes' what we want fer a target!"

"Golly, that's so!" Chick agreed. "Let's get it up high somewheres so's we can shoot from th' top of th' wall where th' dinged ole teachers 'll hear it better!"

Affairs were so adroitly managed that the great saw was suspended from the limb of a tree not twenty feet away from the top of the wall and directly opposite one of the little guard-houses topping it, here and there. From this vantage-ground the boys could shoot without being seen from the windows of the school, some fifty feet away.

The bombardment began at once. The revolver was an old-fashioned, large-bore affair. With each discharge there was a report that would have done justice to a "young gun," as David expressed it. The nearness of the target made a miss improbable. With each hit, the reverberation from the hanging saw was even more terrifying to the mystified teachers and many of the scholars than the steady blasts from the revolver itself.

If those having any curiosity upon this subject will run a broom stick through the hole in the center of a large circular saw, and suspend it between two chairs, then beat its surface with the head of a long iron bolt, they will be rewarded by a lively imitation of one part of this upsetting matinée.

The concealment of the boys made the source of the shots uncertain. Danger seemed to lurk in every window. The principal promptly ordered all in her room to lie prone on the floor, well below the window levels, and so out of range. Hardy scouts were sent to the other rooms with the same hasty commands and with instructions to report if all were safe. Several unterrified and enraptured boys gleefully seized the opportunity to add to the panic and confusion by feigned cries of alarm. All this increased the terror of the others — particularly the feminine portion — many of whom were scared half out of their wits. In the principal's room, a boy screamed, "Teacher, a bullet jes' grazed my head, an' 'most took an ear off!"

The teachers, at their wits' ends, assumed as fearsome and ridiculous postures as any of their flocks — some crept under their desks, and one crouched behind the wood-box.

The thunderous warfare continued with unabated fury.

In despair, the principal soon shrilled out her commands for a retreat, ordering every one to crawl on hands and knees to the stairway and

then out of the building any way they could. Brave couriers were sent ahead to other rooms with like instructions.

In five minutes, the entire building was emptied and the battery silent.

While David was shooting Chick had been peeping through a crack and reporting on the state of affairs in the schoolrooms, until the former relinquished the weapon that he might have his turn at the peep-hole. From their level, they had a good view of each room. The moment the last scrambling, crawling teacher had herded her flock through the door leading from the unhealthful locality, David and Chick felt their presence no longer necessary. They, likewise, beat a retreat to the innermost dungeon of the grewsome prison. And just in season to escape the eyes of a belated policeman whose sleepy attention at last had been awakened by the unusual disturbance.

Safely squatting on the remains of a moldy and rickety bench in the unwholesome, subterranean depths, where so many unruly criminals had dragged out the tedious hours of solitary confinement, the boys puffed away at their sweet-fern in shivering satisfaction at the outcome of

their exploit. One virtue of the burning weed was to dispel the strong and rank odors of this dingy hole, reeking with dampness and decay. Presently their relish of the many amusing episodes of this hilarious exploit subsided somewhat, and a more serious aspect of the affair dawned upon them.

"Gosh, hope we don't get found out!" David reflected.

"You needn't worry, all yer'd have ter fear'd be yore mother; I'd have mine an' my Dad an' th' teachers an' th' whole kit an' kerboodle of th' School Board ter come up 'gainst, besides," observed Chick, with visible uneasiness. "What'd yore mother do ter yer, anyway?"

"Guess she'd shut me up fer a whole afternoon in one of th' dinged ole store-rooms that hasn't any winder in it."

There was such a crafty smile lurking around the corners of David's mouth, as he said this, that his friend's curiosity was aroused to further investigation. "Yer don't seem ter be shakin' much over th' prospect?"

"Nope, wouldn't worry me much, 'specially if Mother went out callin' or sumpthin' of that kind."

"What's goin' out gotter do with it?" Chick persisted.

"Well, yer see, th' first time she chucked me in there, I thought I was in fer it. Gee, it was dark! Then I remembered there wa'n't any lock on th' ole door, an' then I kind of brightened up a bit."

"How'd she keep yer in, then?"

"There's a latch on it an' th' handle's on th' inside, like they always have ter be if th' door opens out."

"Never thought of that," Chick admitted, "but what of it?"

"Well, th' little thumb-piece yer press down on th' inside ter lift th' latch on th' outside, so's yer can open th' door, is gone on that latch, so it was jes' as good as a lock. Anyhow, that's what my mother thought."

"Well, wasn't it; how'd yer work it?"

"I examined th' thing an' figured out if I could get a nail or sumpthin' ter run through where th' thumb-piece used ter be, then I could lift th' latch," David explained. "So I felt through every drawer in th' dark ole hole, an' at last found a little box with hundreds of all sizes of nails in it. Didn't take me long ter fit one, an' now I

carry it with me all th' time, 'cause some one might get wise an' take 'em outer th' store-room."

"Didn't she catch yer?" Chick inquired, much interested.

"Nope. Ole Hannah kept watch, an' when she saw Mother comin' in th' front gate, she gave me th' tip, an' I skinned back an'—"

"Gosh, that ole cook of yourn is nice! Nothin' rotten 'bout her!" Chick interrupted.

"That's so," David resumed, "an' every time Mother sends me ter bed 'thout my supper, ole Hannah always sneaks up th' back stairs with a whole plate of feed."

"Golly, our ole meat-axe wouldn't do that! She hasn't got any more 'preciation'n a block of ice," Chick averred, with a doleful grin. "An' jes' look at all th' nice things I do fer her!"

"Yes yer do!" with an incredulous grin. "How 'bout that loaf of fresh cake yer annexed yesterday? But lemme finish tellin, yer 'bout Mother's shuttin' me up in th' store-room," David pursued. "Yer see, her heart kind of hurt her fer keepin' her angel child in th' dark fer so long, an' so she came hikin' home fore she 'tended to. An' I was cryin' an' sobbin' like a spanked baby when she opened th' door."

"What'd she say?" Chick wanted to know.

"Oh, some gooey stuff like, 'There! There! David dear, don't cry any more. It hurt Mother more than it did you. I've been unhappy all th' afternoon. But it's fer yer own good an' yer must look at it that way.'"

"O gee! wa'n't you th' hot stuff!"

"My eyes hurt me so terrible after being left so long all alone cryin' in th' dark I couldn't study any that night," David grinned. "An' I wanted ter orful. I told her I did."

CHAPTER XVII

AN ANIMATED SCALP-INVIGORATOR

"NANCY, if you knew all I've forgotten you would be quite an accomplished young lady!"

Nancy Packard's face fell as her aunt, in tolerant good nature, freed her mind of this condensed estimate of her niece's character and ability. David, a trifle in the background, was making persistent but futile attempts to impale a live fly on a long needle which he had discovered conveniently handy.

"The idea that you two children, especially David, could be of the slightest use to me in running the house!" Mrs. Hamilton continued, an expression denoting long-suffering experience passing over her face. "You know very well that we expect a house full of guests at Rutherford next month; Senator and Mrs. Peacham and Sinker — as you persist in calling him — and many other of your father's friends and colleagues

are to visit us. And now you two are insisting that Chick be added to the list, and I —"

"Eouch! Gosh! Dern that ole fly! Um—" David fiercely broke in. While dividing his attention between fly-spearing and fear that his plan for Nancy to interpose in behalf of Chick might fail, he had become careless, and speared one of his own fingers. Hastily thrusting the wounded member into his mouth, and sucking it vehemently, he glued his eyes upon his mother's face in an expressionless stare.

"David, once more I tell you not to use such language!" Mrs. Hamilton curtly reprimanded.

"No'm. But if yer don't want me ter help keep th' dog-goned house clean of th' dirty ole flies, I won't! Never get anythin' but blame fer all th' hard work I put in tryin' ter make life easier fer yer!"

She shook her head doubtfully as she mused, half to herself, "And your father said he never did see any one less greedy for work!"

"Well, I'm sure we could help out some!" insisted Nancy. "Never mind, Auntie, let Chick come, anyway! He'd help give Sinker a good time, an' don't you think we ought to consider the pleasure of our company first?"

Mrs. Hamilton's face became a study as she looked piercingly at the girl. Then turning her gaze unexpectedly upon David, she caught the tail-end of a lightning change of countenance; from that of suppressed mirth to one of deep solemnity.

"Well, perhaps one more wouldn't make so very much difference," she slowly acquiesced, for always, in the end, Mrs. Hamilton's sense of hospitality got the better of her judgment. Deep in her heart, she fully appreciated the little plot that was being acted for her undoing. "I will speak to Chick's mother about it when I see her," she resumed, "but I fear she will hesitate before trusting that handsome boy's face in your disfiguring society, David."

"Anyhow, don't be too un-wantin' when yer do see her!" David hopefully counseled—"Perhaps if yer should call on her an' do th' job up like those Dago diplomats do in Washington, she'd come through with it."

"Do what?" was the puzzled question.

"I mean she'd come off her high horse—I mean—" hastily, as he saw signs of trouble, "I mean let Chick go. She can fix him up as spiffy as she wants ter, I won't—"

"David, what do you mean by such fearful slang? What does 'spiffy' mean?"

"Oh, don't yer know?" David replied with a superior air, "It means all dolled up or classy."

Nancy Packard vanished. About this time David remembered some unfulfilled task and hastily blurted out, as words of rebuke were forming themselves on the mouth of the shocked parent, "Mother, dear, guess I'll be pullin' some of those weeds in th' flower-beds now," the last words hurtling back over his shoulder during a precipitate departure.

Mrs. Hamilton called on Chick's mother that very day, and arranged matters to the satisfaction of all, but at the expense of a good measure of the very kind of diplomacy that David had suspected as being needful.

At the termination of the visit, and as a parting word of further assurance, Mrs. Hamilton said, "I am glad you feel more kindly about the matter. The boys are now past the hippity-hoppity age, and ought to be reasonable. I am sure there will be less trouble from now on. I know David is no saint, but he is really very fond of your boy, and doesn't want the friendship broken up. He knows what to expect if he transgresses."

"After all, I suppose my boy's disposition is not much to boast of," was the other's humorous admission. "I know he has a quick temper; he kicks shamefully every time he gets mad at home. You just ought to see my legs!"

They both enjoyed a hearty laugh over this little pleasantry, and parted with warm protestations of friendship and peace.

The moment David heard of the favorable outcome, and that he was once more restored to the good graces of Chick's mother, he sought out the war-scarred gladiator with, "Say, Chick, yer mother says yer can go ter th' country with us if we'll cut out th' scrappin'. For th' love of Mike, let's don't say anythin' ter get each other sore 'fore it's time ter go!"

"Oh! come off! No such luck as that! Can't fool me with—"

"Bet yer a million dol—"

"Never mind, I want ter believe yer, all right 'nuff! We'll give each other th' glad hand all th' time," Chick enthusiastically affirmed, his face aglow with anticipation. "Gee, though, I'm some joyful I'm goin', if I really an' truly am; that's what!" Then, a moment later, "Oh, I say, Mister David, would you be so kind as to

give me a chew of that gum, I would be very grateful for such a generous display of courtesy on your part."

"Golly, aren't yer th' swell gentleman!" David chuckled, handing over a piece of the coveted chewing-material. "Guess we won't do th' pugilist act much over that kind of dope."

"Say, who'll be down ter yore blamed place, anyway, 'sides all us here an' th' bunch of company yer goin' ter have?" sounded Chick.

"Nobody but my aunt — but she ain't bad — an' my grandmother who's too ancient ter bother much, an', well, that's all but th' servants an' farm people."

"How old d'jer 'spose yore grandmother is?" Chick investigated, much interested, as he could not recall any of his own grandparents, all having finished their earthly pilgrimages during his extreme youth.

"Oh, I dunno; orful old," David replied, scratching his head in perplexity.

"'Spose she's very much older'n my father, he's forty years old an' ain't dead yet!"

"Gosh, yes! twice as old!" David boasted, viewing his friend in mild triumph.

"Phew!" whistled the astonished boy.

"Didn't know people did live so long! Jes' think how dern long 'tis from th' end of summer vacation 'til the next one begins! Think she'd want ter die not bein' able ter snowball or any real thing like that." Then, after an energetic gum-chewing interlude, he burst out, "Golly! what yer doin' with that ole straw hat? Didn't notice it before."

David quickly drew out of reach, for the other made a sudden attempt to snatch the astonishing head-gear.

"Cheese it!" David protested, "Got sumpthin' in there!"

"Not much, I guess, if yer mean yore bean," still trying to gain possession of the high-crowned, broad-brimmed affair; of the type once commonly seen in the New England hay-fields.

The particular frayed specimen that decorated David's head was about as attractive-looking as a faded wreath on a monument, and was still less attractive on account of being several sizes too large for the wearer and tilted back on his head and down over his ears, so that with each movement of his jaw, when vigorously manipulating his gum, the hat jumped up and down like the leather flap in a pair of bellows.

"Quit it, I tell yer!" David again remonstrated. "We'll have some fun if yer'll leave things 'lone an' not spoil it all!"

"Let's have it then!" Chick grumbled, a bit stiffly.

"Well," David began, with an impassive face, carefully adjusting his hat, "yer see I caught a field mouse up in th' garden this mornin', an' put him in th' top of my hat, that's why I had ter get this one with th' high crown outer th' attic, so's there'd be room 'nuff fer him ter run round."

"What! O gosh! Yer don't say yer've got a mouse hikin' it 'round under that ole hay-seed thing!" was the bewildered exclamation.

"Sure! why not? makes my scalp feel good as he runs 'round an' scratches. Don't yer scalp ever itch? Mouse's best thing fer it. Makes it feel orful good." There was a look of owlish gravity on the boy's face as he spoke.

"Nix on it fer me!" was the hasty objection. "But where does my fun come in?"

"Well, I'll bet yer a million dollars yer'll see in a minute!" was the reassuring response. "All we gotter do is jes' go right down ter Miss Murphy's mil'nery store, an' go right in."

"I don't see anythin' in that!" grunted Chick, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

"Yer will, jes' th' same, if yer follow me an' keep yer eyes peeled!"

With Chick a doubting companion, David set forth in quest of Miss Murphy's. At the door of that establishment, the largest and most fashionable of its kind in the city, the boys came to a halt. Here David again arranged his hat, gave his head a vigorous shake to stir his animated scalp renovator to greater activity, boldly opened the door and entered. Taking a rapid survey of the interior, he selected that part favored with the greatest number of patrons, and wormed his way among them to the counter's edge with Chick close at his heels. One elderly female and some assistants were on the opposite side busily engaged in attending to the wants of the fickle-minded customers.

All gazed in open-mouthed amazement and mirth at the strangely hatted little head thrust so unceremoniously into their midst.

One of Miss Murphy's employees, a weazened-up little old spinster — one of the kind who look as though they had been nourished eternally

on salt fish — testily inquired what she might do for the strange apparition.

"D'jer sell plows here?" was the serious query.

"No, of course not," the astounded woman irritably replied, staring outraged at the intruder. "You want to go to a hardware store."

"Thank you, lady!" David politely returned, making a finished bow, and sweeping the counter with his tattered monstrosity.

A lively and thoroughly frightened mouse leaped from the top of David's head directly on to that of the spinster "sales-lady." With a desperate scream of terror, the distracted woman whisked the scourge on to the counter where it scuttled along into the protecting foliage of a flower-garden effect topping a fearful design in female hats that a large overdressed woman was examining; evidently the mouse mistook this horticultural scene for a section of his native heath.

Not being satisfied with the natural conspicuousness due to the generous rotundity of her curves, this victim of the little animal's fright had added to the situation by wearing a gown of such a large, startling design, that she looked like a walking portière.

Upon suddenly becoming aware that the shrubbery in her hands was harboring a very much alive specimen of the rodent family, she billowed into a frenzy of delirium. Thrusting the hat, in passionate haste, into the face of the fish-complexioned spinster, the portière individual revolved on the counter-stool with such energy that her elephantine legs tumbled several customers into a helpless tangle.

Without noticeable deliberation, the outraged vendor of millinery, amid a paroxysm of electric screams, hurled the dreaded object back among the fluttering and terrified customers, who were clambering on to the unstable, revolving stools. The mouse, having found his flower-garden of too fugitive a character, was just streaking it across the floor when the fat lady lost her footing and landed fairly on the scurrying pest, mashing it into the shape of a pancake. Fortunately, the poor little victim had been spared prolonged suffering.

The two boys on the "side-lines," as they afterwards described it, were held spellbound by the fascinating success of their venture. They waited long enough to witness the look of loathing that contorted the human catapult's countenance when

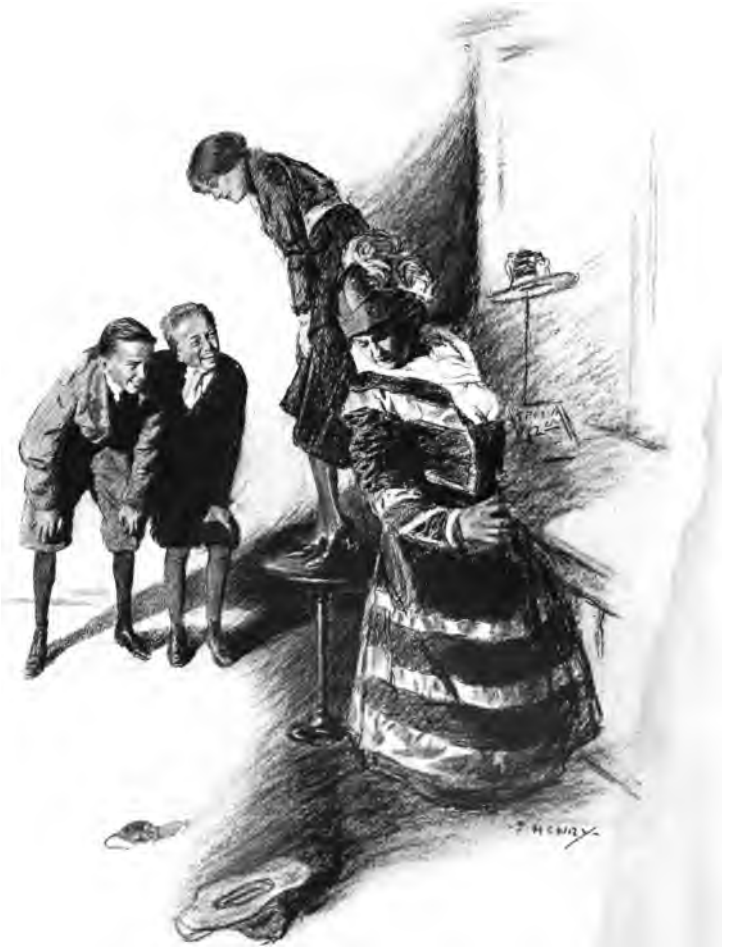
she took stock of the gory condition of her gaudy toggery, and then softly withdrew from a scene so full of tribulation.

"Say, Chick," David unconcernedly began, upon reaching the serene quiet of the street, "my mother's birthday's next week, an' I know what I'm goin' ter give her."

"What?"

"A pair of stockings, an' now I know th' fashionable color, too."

"Gorry, but ye're th' proper guy!" admired Chick, full of appreciation at the other's meaning. "That show was jes' lumptious! Wa'n't that ole butter-tub that did th' slaughter act some high tumbler fer such a bundle of flesh?"



THE MOUSE HAVING FOUND HIS FLOWER-GARDEN OF TOO FUGITIVE A CHARACTER, WAS JUST STREAKING IT ACROSS THE FLOOR.
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CHAPTER XVIII

HOW DAVID WENT TO CHURCH

THE opening of this chapter finds the Hamiltons at Rutherford whither they migrated some two weeks earlier. Mr. Hamilton, coming directly from Washington, after the adjournment of Congress, met them upon their arrival. There were but few guests, as yet, and even Chick would be unable, for a brief respite, to shed the light of his presence over the family circle, his school not having closed.

It was Sunday morning — a day towards which David looked with anxious misgivings; a day full of deep forebodings until the breakfast hour was safely ended. By this it should be understood that his fate on the subject of church-going was usually decided during that lengthy repast.

Mr. Hamilton had always practised a keen game of wits with his children. If any of them were smart enough to outwit him, in the daily exercise

of give and take, he rather took pride in the fact, and never found fault. But all should be fair and above-board; no cheating nor playing fast and loose with the sacred truth; simply that if he were beaten in a fair game of mental agility, he acted the true sport, and one and all respected and admired him for it. Likewise, they knew just where they stood, and used their strategy accordingly.

If on a Sabbath morn, while at the long table, Mr. Hamilton's eyes chanced to fall on his restless son — using every effort to shrink his chubby form into nothingness — and it so happened that thoughts of church were, at that particular instant, in the former's mind, a faint glow of satisfaction would illumine his face while he issued the dreaded command, "Young man, I want you to go to church to-day." And David knew he was beaten. On the other hand, if the meal passed without this grievous visitation, he was free for the day; provided, always — and this very important point was never overlooked by our hero — his father failed to find him before the family religious pilgrimage began.

David, with a reputation for a normal appetite, to say the least, was nervously abstemious during

the Sunday breakfast ordeal. Besides, to eat freely or ask for "second helpings," was opposed to his chameleon-like policy of trying to blend his figure with the landscape, so to speak. It might be supposed that, once his fate was decided by the tragical sentence, and the uncertainty over, David would fall to and make up for lost time, but it was not that way! He was so discomfited and chock-full of rage at his defeat that he could not eat at all. So, at best, the first Sunday repast was a hectic one for David, and unsatisfactory so far as relieving the cravings of hunger was concerned.

On the few occasions that Mr. Hamilton realized, soon after they had risen from the table, a lapse in duty towards his son, he promptly sent some one, or went himself, in search of the truant, and was more than likely to be rewarded by a glimpse of a pair of heels rounding the corner of a distant building or disappearing into the barn; but his missions never bore any better fruit.

David gave but little heed to his mother during the trying hour of these fiery ordeals, for he could usually depend upon the duties of hospitality at her large table to keep her fully occupied.

These weekly nightmares made heavy draughts upon his store of invention. Once or twice, quite

unobserved by all but those who would not "tattle," he succeeded in slipping under the table, as they were all pushing back their chairs.

Another expedient was laid bare one day, after the return from church, when his father demanded, with well-feigned severity, "David, where did you go right after breakfast?"

"Oh, I dunno! guess I must gone out to th' barn," his son cautiously replied.

"Yes, I saw you, and you were going mighty fast," Mr. Hamilton grimly agreed, giving him a long, searching look, "but when I reached there, right afterwards, and shouted my head nearly off calling you, I got no answer. Didn't you hear me?"

"No sir," was the unblushing statement! It was quite true, and not, for an instant, doubted.

Mr. Hamilton seemed puzzled. He viewed the unabashed youth fixedly for a brief moment while debating with himself as to whether he wanted to know the secret. Finally, he questioned, "Where in that barn were you?" There was decided emphasis on the third and fourth words.

"Who said I was in th' barn?" gasped the astonished David.

"No one; now tell me just where you could

hide there and be out of reach of any such shouting as I indulged in this morning!"

David was dumfounded. He had long harbored the suspicion that his father's keen penetrating eyes bored their way into his brain and picked his thoughts out piecemeal. He remembered that one half-witted chore-boy used always to hide when he saw Mr. Hamilton coming, and, on being asked the reason, gave answer, in a voice husky with awe, "The Senator's eyes go right through yer; he can tell jes' what yer 'ain't ben doin' all day."

Incoherent mutterings now escaped the cornered David; some such terms as "blamed" and "derned" might have been detected by a well-attuned ear.

"What did you say?" his father pursued, thoroughly enjoying the situation, although his face was as impassive as marble.

"Well, I guess I didn't say much of anythin'," David managed to utter, for he was desperately unhappy at the prospect of disclosing a retreat so near at hand where quick oblivion might often save the day.

"I am listening!" persisted the inquisitor.

"Well, I 'spose I gotter!" was the forlorn re-

sponse. "If yer climb inter th' haymow under one of th' beams, yer can follow it clean ter th' back boardin'."

"And you can't hear any outside sounds in there?"

"Guess not; never tried!"

"Guess you never did," was the quick agreement. "Did you dig that hole?"

"Well, I helped."

"So you couldn't hear if any one called you?"

"Yes — no — well, anyway, that wasn't th' whole reason." A faint glimmer of appreciation might have been observed on Mr. Hamilton's face as, without further words, he turned to his reading. But David failed to notice it.

After this long digression, that the reader might come to a better understanding of our hero's Sunday tribulations, let us take up the thread where we dropped it in the first part of this chapter. There we stated that David was about to chance the quicksands of another Sabbath breakfast.

He sat well back in his chair, so as to be partially shielded from his father's view by the protecting form of the genial and portly family doctor from Chester who was paying them a fleeting

visit. From this precarious shelter, David made fitful attacks upon a dish of cereal which unwisely he had placed close to the edge of the table — the better, as he reasoned, to keep out of notice. That was a mistake, for the insecurity of its position was fatal to his plans; thus David was preparing a disappointment for himself. During one of his long probes for a spoonful of its contents, the dish toppled over. He rashly jumped to save it, and — dish and boy — together fetched up under the board to a great clatter of breaking china. But that was not all: He landed fairly on top of the devoted Alfred, who, as usual, whenever he could pass the eyes of the many sentinels who harbored contrary notions, had located himself at his master's feet beneath the table. The startling yelp now vented from the throat of Alfred upon this sudden visitation added nothing to David's comfort.

As the bedraggled head, dripping with cereal and cream, slowly arose above the table's edge, to the unsuppressed mirth of Nancy Packard, Mr. Hamilton solemnly decreed, "David, you will go to church to-day!"

"Yes, sir!" and in a lower tune, "Of all th' doggoned —"

"What?"

"Yes, sir. I'm goin' ter church."

And so it looked, even to David. And there was fishing going on over in the pasture brook!

In a deep state of dejection, and followed by Alfred, David sought the seclusion of the barn; to the uttermost depths of the "back boardin'." Here he alternately pondered on the cheerless situation and the giving of oral testimony as to his own "bone-headedness."

"I'm dinged sorry, ole doggy," he asserted in an apologetic tone to the partner in his misfortune. "I know I made a sad mess of things, but there wasn't any good in yore yelping like an ordinary cur. Now they'll be on, an' yer won't get any more reserved seat where smellin's good an' I can smuggle nice things down ter yer every now an' then, when nobody's lookin'."

Alfred showed his appreciation by giving a succession of violent sneezes, caused by the dusty hay.

There followed a long season of serious thought.

Finally, David gave a prolonged whistle, started to crawl out once more to assist the sun in giving light to the world, then hesitated and pon-

dered some more. This was followed by some Chinese-like computations on his fingers, which we assume had to do with the amount of time available, then he deliberately wormed his way to the barn floor. Thence he ambled along into the house, whistling in suspicious contentment. Of his mother he sweetly inquired as to her preference in the matter of his wearing apparel. Somewhat nonplussed at this extraordinary meekness, and a trifle dubious as to what it might portend, she returned, "Your best, new suit, of course."

"Yes'm."

The church being some two miles distant and the requirements for transportation considerable, Mr. Hamilton had recently added to his equipment a large conveyance with two long seats running lengthwise from the driver's seat. Upon the morning in question, when this vehicle was brought to the front of the house, there sat David snugly tucked under a light robe and close beside the prim and proper-looking coachman. The carriage was quickly filled and driven away, Mr. Hamilton viewing with much satisfaction the little figure on the front seat.

The church was one of those fine types of old New England architecture, with many broad steps

leading to its several portals. It was not David's intention that these should cast their gloom over his head with any undue frequency, for, to that irrepressible person, entering the gloomy region beyond was akin to a visit to the land of misery.

The Hamilton equipage drew alongside the curb; David dropped to the sidewalk, and started up the steps well in advance of the family so that he was in good view to all. When nearly at the top, he was brought to a sudden and willing halt by the thundering voice of his father, "Young man, where are you going in those clothes?"

"Goin' ter church; that's what you said."

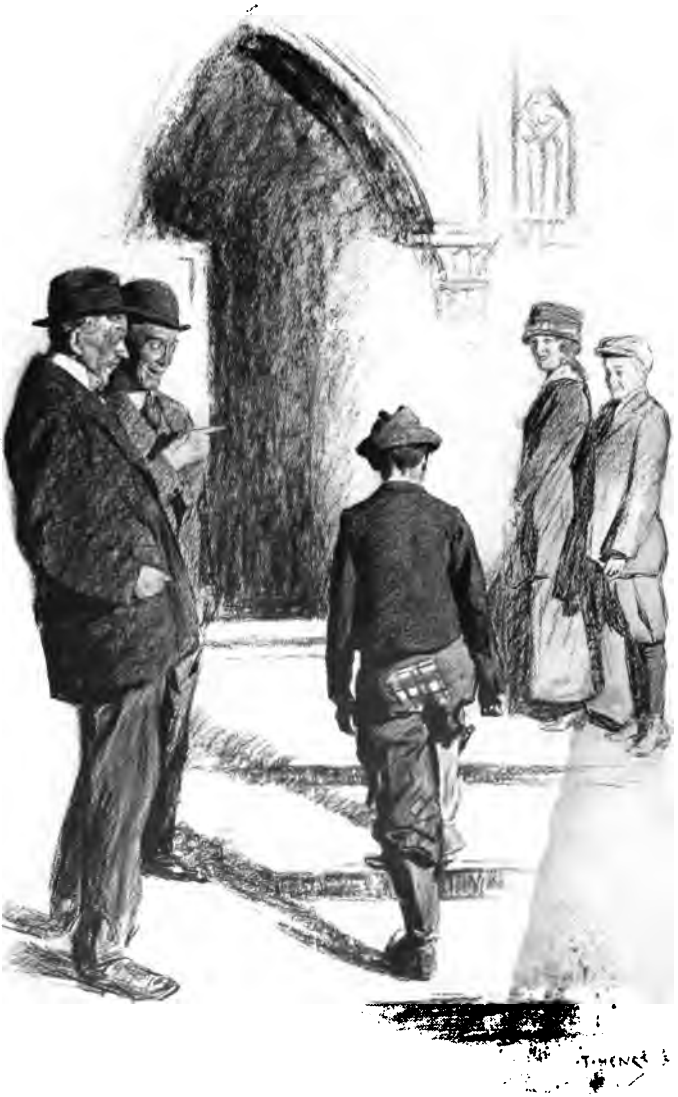
"You march right back into that carriage, and go home!"

"Yes sir, but you said I was ter —"

"Did you hear me?" Mr. Hamilton sternly demanded. "Return home at once!"

"Yes sir, an' ain't that jes' my dern luck, when I get all het up fer church yer won't lemme go!"

Nancy Packard was in hysterics; the jolly family physician was leaning against the rail choking with merriment; nowhere was there a serious face to be seen. Many other church-goers — the weather being fine, the congregation was large — joined in the levity at Mr. Hamilton's expense,



DAVID STARTED UP THE STEPS WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE FAMILY, SO THAT HE WAS IN GOOD VIEW TO ALL.—*Page 268.*

who gave way to a suppressed fit of laughter the moment David's back was turned.

The upper half of the latter's appearance was a model of propriety; from his waist down he was costumed in a large baggy pair of trousers pilfered from the chore-boy; patched, tattered and torn, with both legs tucked into a pair of ill-fitting, long-legged, cow-hide boots, that resounded audibly as he clumped along, and that might have seen service in twenty muddy plow-fields. The large plaid patch covering most of the seat of the trousers, faded to a rusty, nail-hole brown, lent to the scene the effect of a Rocky-Mountain sunset.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RUTHERFORD MINUTE-MEN SEE SERVICE

WHILE waiting for Chick's arrival, David joined forces with some of his friends in the village, and found matters not too irksome in the interval. In the same tedious manner, their school was dragging its long session far into the hot days of June. Affairs of unusual moment, however, were engaging the attention of the village boys to the exclusion of most things academic. During the winter, they had formed a military company, and were receiving instructions in drill two evenings a week. In this commendable movement, the townspeople had given very general encouragement. Up to the present time, any substitute for a rifle or gun had been improvised; from broomsticks to the real article. But looking forward to another winter, and basing their request upon public approval and a good record of

attendance, a petition had been submitted to the selectmen for money to purchase some condemned army rifles, offered at a low price, and for sanction to use the town-hall for drill purposes.

With no thought for other than a ready consent, they were thrown into a furor of hot-headed disappointment upon losing their case by the close vote of three to two; the day being carried against them by the narrow-minded and ill-advised argument of one Lemuel Swig, who declared that "broomsticks are plenty good enough fer th' little lazy-bones; they'd a sight better be pickin' tater-bugs an' pullin' whiteweed than struttin' 'round like a passel of peacocks."

For three nights following this attack on the "Rutherford Minute-Men" the full company had gathered in angry mood to avenge this scorching indignity. It was on this third night that David, getting wind of the tempest, added his — not what you would call soothing — presence to the occasion.

For some time, he sat on the fence-rail and chewed his gum in silence, waiting to get the drift of the argument.

"Ole Swig is a dern ole skinflint, anyway," declared one mettlesome youth. "Th' grocery

clerk tole me that he buys three ten-cent cigars every mornin' at th' three fer a quarter price, but don't take but one then, an' another after dinner, an' th' last one after supper, when he plunks down his quarter."

"What's he do that fer?" some one questioned.

"So he can save interest on his money, I guess; 'sides not takin' a chance of breakin' one durin' th' day. Also heard he does it ter save th' risk of havin' any on him case he kicks th' bucket 'fore night."

"That ain't nothin'," contributed another irrepressible. "When he moved th' family corpses from th' little ole buryin' place out back his house inter th' regular cemetery, he put eight or ten ole sets of bones inter one box jes' ter save money."

"Gosh!" chuckled another boy; "guess there'll be some hustlin' sortin' out their bones so as ter get th' right legs an' arms that belongs ter 'em when th' resurrection takes place!"

"An' that ain't all of it," the first speaker went on. "There was an iron fence round th' little family lot, an' ole Swig put it 'round his own front yard. It's there now. Think he'd see all kind of ghosts, nights. I never go by on that

side of th' street when it's dark; not so yer'd notice it! Our cook says she's seen lots of ghosts sitting on th' top rail, an' it's a great place fer hoot-owls; hooting at ole Swig fer 'sturbin' th' dead, she says."

"Well, what we goin' ter do 'bout it? Here we've been chewin' th' rag fer three nights now, an' nothin' doin'," stewed a fidgety little chap. "Why can't Jim Clements s'gest sumpthin' if he's goin' ter be cap'n?"

"Well, I have; lots of things," retorted the one referred to, "an' none of 'em gets by. There's Dave Hamilton sittin' up there; ask him!"

All turned to David, who, deliberately removing his well-worn gum an' sticking it on to the lobe of his left ear so that he could address the meeting with better voice, and, at the same time, have his hands free to clasp them over one knee, thus berated them: "Well, yer can't get guns or ole Swig's scalp by jawin' at him here alongside this ole dump-heap. Instead of beefin' all th' time why don't yer get a move on an' do sumpthin'?"

"Well, ain't that jes' what we're tryin' ter do?" was the fretful chorus.

"Let's go an' serenade him then!" David pro-

posed. "Pull his spooky fence down or snake his door-bell out by th' roots; jerk his potatoes all up, bugs an' all; throw red paint all over th' front of his house; pour vinegar in his milk-cans; gosh, there is a billion things yer can do! I'll bet yer a million dol—!"

"Gee, come on!" the fidgety boy cut in. "You're a nice bunch of sap-heads! No one ever thought of any nice things like that. Hurry up now, an' get a move on!" starting impetuously down the street.

The rest followed on with no fixed plan except that of general destruction.

Lemuel Swig was not at home; a fact unknown to the avengers. In silence, they gathered in a group beneath the shadows of an orchard across the way from the house with the haunted fence. There, the crew quite naturally turned to David for an inspiration upon the subject of the next move.

A sudden charge at the Swig homestead, each with an armful of stones to throw on to the roof, followed by an urgent pulling of the door-bell, lifting of blinds from their hinges, pounding upon the front door and windows, while hooting like owls, was his first proposal.

Stone-picking began at once. It was a bright moonlight night, and the owner of the land unwittingly received some degree of benefit, because of the transfer of so much unfertile mineral matter from his land to that of Mr. Swig.

Upon some hundred of pounds of native munitions being thus gathered, and all being in readiness, the order to charge was given. A din of owl-hooting that would have convinced every superstitious cook in the county that old Swig had been "sent for," issued from the two score of throats as the rocks began to rattle upon the roof as though all the demons from the nether world were without, and rapping for admission. Just as the warriors closed in and began their attack at close quarters, and frightened heads appeared at the windows, the hostile Mr. Swig rounded the corner of the street, and took the doughty Minute-Men in the flank.

Stopping only a moment in bewilderment at this disruption of law and order, he flamed into an outbreak of passion, rushed into the vortex, and seized two offenders by the coat-collars. The others scattered like chaff before a cyclone.

Shaking his prisoners in wrath, and shouting that he'd have the rest of them in the "lock-up"

before morning, he marched his captives down the street towards the police station.

David now rose to the occasion. Hastily whistling the vanquished army together, he declared that they must free the two boys somehow, "'cause we'd be a lot of sneaks if we didn't; an', 'sides, they'll have ter tell on th' rest of us if th' police get hole of 'em." It is possible that the latter reason was the more convincing.

"What'll we do, quick?" rattled the fidgety boy.

"Cut round th' block an' meet 'em down by th' ole mill, where it's dark under th' big elms. Now follow me, an' rush him when I give th' word; grab him by th' legs or any ole way, long as yer get him down an' let th' fellers 'scape!"

It was all well done up to one point: In the mêlèe, the gentleman Swig was a bit roughly handled, and those bound for the "lock-up" freed, but in the mix-up David had caught hold of the bear's tail and feared to let go. He had executed a very effective manœuvre. Circling around and stalking his quarry from the rear, he locked his own arms into the bent elbows of Mr. Swig at the instant that person was attacked from the fore. The unexpected jiu-jitsu warfare

waged by David had gone far towards setting free the unhappy prisoners. But now how, in turn, to let go of his own prisoner without being captured himself was what threw David's thinking apparatus into high speed.

The two struggled and wrestled; the man to shake off the writhing burden and turn on his assailant, the latter to hold on until he could devise a scheme likely to prove helpful. The valiant Minute-Men formed an admiring audience crowding one another for vantage ground; for all intents and purposes as though it were a dog fight.

Over the gutter and across the sidewalk the battling pair worked their way, David frozen to the back of the large man like the monkey strapped to that of the horse in the circus ring. At this juncture, David thought to set his teeth into one of the ears of his enemy. A howl of protest and animosity bellowed forth from the victim.

"Soak it ter him, Dave!" encouraged the audience. "Bite it clean off. Pull out his whiteweed!"

So David let go of the ear and chewed at the hair.

Then they came up against a picket fence.

This tickled David's back so smartly that he, too, gave suffering expression to a more than passing bit of discomfort.

"Sumpthin's gotter be done, an' dern quick," the boy angrily muttered. But here a saving inspiration came to his mind.

"Say, some of you lazy galoots, grab on ter his feet an' pull 'em out from under th' dinged ole bug-picker, while I hole on ter him from behind!"

They understood. In a twinkling Mr. Swig lay prone on his back in spite of sundry vicious kicks in attempting to do damage to his opponents.

All were free now, and the neighborhood cleared of their blighting presence in a decidedly brief space of time.

Each sought oblivion in his own particular way. For the most part, home seemed to offer the best port in the gathering tempest. There was no doubt that this was David's view of it, and with intensity of purpose he made tracks directly across country in total contempt of all recognized lines of travel. Arriving at that haven of refuge, he stumbled up the stairs, threw off his clothes, and plunged into bed, drawing a breath of relief at the seeming security that this sanctuary afforded.

Nor did he approach too near the dangerous confines of the village during the following day, although he did a very creditable piece of scout work by which he learned that a great turmoil had raged there upon Mr. Swig's reaching the police station after being so disgracefully vanquished by the Minute-Men. He was for "havin' th' law on" the entire military organization for assault and battery. He took it for granted that all of those belonging to the company had been among his assailants.

As this included the sons of most of the leading men in town, it was with some difficulty that the officer, of whom demand was made for warrants to arrest the boys, and who, at heart, had little sympathy with the crotchety Mr. Swig, was able to dissuade the angry man from his purpose.

The local reporters sent lengthy dispatches to the metropolitan papers, giving a picturesque description of the riotous conduct of the "Rutherford School Cadets." During the day, one or more of these sensational sheets, with their flaring headlines, fell into the hands of Mr. Hamilton. After dinner that evening, and just as David was edging towards the door, anticipating a storm, the

depressed youth was called into the dreaded seclusion of his father's study. Having awkwardly slipped into the chair indicated for him, and feeling ill at ease under the penetrating parental gaze, not knowing what it might foretell, the guilty David squirmed most uneasily in his seat.

Finally, his father shot the query, "David, what were you doing last night when that rascally crowd assaulted Mr. Swig?"

Seeing an endless quagmire of tribulation ahead, David stammered out the words, "Well, p'raps, I — I — was somewheres 'bout th-there."

"Did you lay your contaminating hands on Mr. Swig?" was the next cross-question.

"Do what? Well, maybe I sort of run 'gainst him," was the rueful response, "but I didn't hole on any longer'n I could help."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, yer see, I had him by th' arms from th' back, an' I couldn't leggo 'thout his grabbin' me."

Mr. Hamilton was suddenly afflicted with a spasm of choking, which it required a dexterous movement of his handkerchief to smother. After a brief pause, his impassive face appeared from behind the protecting shield as he further

sternly interrogated, "What else did you do to him?"

"Not much of anythin'; I jes' kind of bit his ear an' chewed out some of his hair, an' gee! I ain't got th' disgustable taste of it out of my mouth yet! He uses hair-oil."

Mr. Hamilton was seized with another fit of coughing, and again obliged to have sudden recourse to his handkerchief.

This spell passing away like the first, he fished deeper into the unsavory affair with, "Most disgraceful! Did you finally make your escape unmaimed?"

"Un — what?" inquired David, apprehensively.

"Unhurt," translated his father.

"If yer'd call only gettin' a few million fence pickets driven 'bout a mile inter yer back not gettin' hurt, then I guess I did," was the woebegone reply.

With some difficulty a renewed fit of coughing was suppressed by the severe parent. With a grave shake of the head, he thus addressed the crestfallen youth, who was swallowing painfully in anxious suspense as to his fate: "What do

you mean by such ruffianly conduct as chewing the ears and biting out the hair of one of the town selectmen? The idea that a boy of mine should fasten himself like a tiger on to the back of so respected a citizen and disfigure him in that manner is beyond all precedent: Now, young man, what have you to say for yourself?"

Whenever his father used the term, "young man," the wayward son always felt that uncommon trouble was brewing. So, on this gloomy occasion, he gave an estimating look at the noncommittal face, but discerning no hope there, desperately floundered, "He ain't a 'spected citizen! He's an' old skinflint! Anyhow, I'll bet you'd never stood on th' side-lines an' seen an ole lemony thing like that carry off two of yore best friends that were only jes' havin' a little innocent fun 'thout yer'd tried ter help 'em out!"

It is wonderful how the customs of youth accept on so friendly terms those whom they have met for the first time!

For some moments, Mr. Hamilton viewed his suffering son with worried brows — suffering both mentally and otherwise, for his bodily contortions gave painful testimony of the searching power of fence-pickets. "What's the matter?"

was the next question. "Why are you so uneasy?"

"Guess you'd be uneasy, if yer had 'bout forty-leven ole fence pickets broken off in yore back."

After a delay that was gall to David, and during which his father, with bent head, appeared to be hunting for something in the waste basket, the inquisitorial proceedings continued: "Didn't you lay hands on Mr. Swig until he had seized the other boys?" The question was accompanied by a long penetrating look.

"No sir; course I wouldn't!" Then, with a sudden burst of hope, "No one but a coward would run off an' play th' sneak when a man that wa'n't a cop tried ter run in his dearest friends!"

"Hum!" Mr. Hamilton turned absently to his neglected paper.

Two days later, there were thrust into the doorways of all houses and places of business, as well as generously distributed over the sidewalks, countless little feverish pink-colored handbills calling startling attention to the martyrdom of one Lemuel Swig. The whole community bore the appearance of undergoing a widespread eruption of nettle-rash.

THE ILLUSTRATED SPORTING WORLD
Published by Illustrated Sporting World
Pub. Co., Franklin Sq., New York
No. 61

OUT MONDAY, JUNE 24

WILL ILLUSTRATE THE

RUFFIANLY CONDUCT

OF THE

RUTHERFORD SCHOOL CADETS

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Scarcely had the village been so thoroughly decorated in this way, than a quickly summoned file of the valiant "Minute-Men" rushed here and there in burning effort to collect the last one of these telltale accusations, so damaging to the hitherto spotless record of that organization.

CHAPTER XX

MAROONED IN THE FLOOD

"OPEN house" was now in full swing at the Hamilton place. Chick and Sinker had both descended upon the household, and David was in a high state of bliss at this successful outcome of his plans. It was with some forebodings, however, that his father and mother contemplated the prospect. At the best, they were unable to banish the suspicion that they were living over a miniature volcano.

Some hours before the regular breakfast hour, this first morning that the trio ventured forth in search of conquest found them headed for a brook that crossed a neighbor's field. Near where the winding stream flowed from under an arch beneath a railroad embankment, it skirted a steep bank. At the foot of this and next the brook, Samuel Junkins, to whom the field belonged, had long striven to preserve sufficient level ground for the passage of his farm wagons. In antagonism

to this essential means of reaching the hay land beyond, David and co-workers had as industriously dug the bank away. This was done with the twofold design of enlarging the swimming-hole, thus forced upon the unwilling Mr. Junkins, and to secure the filling for a dam that, with beaver-like persistency, the boys repaired as often as it was destroyed by the irritated farmer. And this was every time he chanced that way.

Only recently, Mr. Junkins, upon seeing David under the suspicious circumstances of returning along the railroad track from the direction of the swimming-hole, with a mop of wet hair, hailed him in a surly voice with, "Look a-here, ye! There's ben a lot o' diggin' goin' on intew that bank o' mine down thar by th' arch lately, an' ye can lay yore last bottom dollar that if I ever ketch th' young scalawags that done it, I'll horsewhip 'em within an inch o' their lives."

"Well, I'd think yer would," chimed in the innocent-faced young gentleman. "I'll tell yer what I'll do, Mr. Junkins; if I ever see any boys doin' it, I'll tell 'em ter go up ter yore house, 'cause yer want ter see 'em."

"By Jingo! I kin see ye a-doin' it!" was the cynical retort. "Guess ye might hev tew do a

mighty lot o' talkin' tew yoreself if ye did, 'cordin' tew my way o' thinkin'."

The nonchalant David whistled unconcernedly as he sauntered along, taking pot-shots with a sling at small animal life enjoying a precarious existence among the rocks of the moss-covered walls.

For the three days preceding the advent of Chick and Sinker, the weather-man had pulled the throttle wide open, so that a veritable deluge had fallen upon the earth, to the great vexation of all farmers who chanced to have any considerable amount of "hay out." Mr. Junkins was one of the unfortunates. The stream that meandered through his field was called "Fresh Brook"—originally, "The Freshet," from the fact that the natural formation of the area which it drained was such that during any considerable rain-storm the water sought the bottom-lands so rapidly that the little valley soon became a river of no mean width. During the long rain just passed, Mr. Junkins found occasion to move many bunches of hay beyond the reach of the rising flood. Billy Paradise, Mr. Hamilton's foreman on his farm, had observed to David, when the storm was at its height, "Glad we 'ain't got any hay out. Ole

Junkins' got a sight on it moldin' down thar in th' brook field. If he don't keep his eyes peeled all-fired smart, some o' them cocks 'll go down stream in th' freshet."

David looked doubtfully at the speaker for a few moments, while evidently turning over in his mind a matter of some importance. "Would one of those bunches of hay float yer?" he inquired, with a show of intense interest.

"Well, I dunno as they would; not me, I reckon, 's big as I be," Billy Paradise hesitated, looking suspiciously at the boy. "Might hole a little chap like ye, though," he resumed, a twinkle of understanding coming into his face; "that is, if it so happened he was a good swimmer."

There were signs of clearing weather the evening that David's two friends arrived. In consequence, the first peep of dawn, the next morning, discovered him smothering a noisy alarm-clock under the bed-clothes, and addressing impatient remarks to the clanging thing because of the long-drawn-out ringing of its woes. Finally, it fell into silence, and David bounded to the window to inspect the weather. Finding the sun just peeping brightly over the eastern hills, he routed out the other boys, who, heeding cautions

not to make any unnecessary noise, dressed quickly, and followed into the farm-yard.

"Come on now!" David urged, "We gotter get busy 'fore ole Junkins gets wise ter th' weather. He might come foolin' down 'round th' brook ter count his haycocks, fer all I know."

So they hurried along, and soon reached their goal. The brook was in full flood, several hundred feet wide, and running swiftly. It had continued to rise during the night, so, in spite of Mr. Junkins' precautions, numerous bunches of hay were partially afloat and only held to their moorings by a treacherous anchorage.

"Gee, but aren't we in luck!" cried David, racing headlong to the brink and viewing the situation. "Dern good thing yer learned ter swim this year, Sinker, or this 'd be no place fer infants like you!"

"Say, what'd th' ole hayseed that owns all this cole-slaw do if he gets on ter us?" inquired Chick, throwing little nervous glances back over his shoulder.

"Horsewhip us within an inch of our lives!" David promptly declared, with a look of firm conviction.

"Gosh, then, let's hope he don't disfigure th'

landscape with his presence 'til we-all get afloat," Sinker returned.

"All aboard, now!" shouted their leader. "Each feller get on ter a bunch an' push off, an' we'll be hikin' it down stream like tugboats."

And so it was done. It added to their welfare, as we shall presently see, that the three voyagers were barefooted besides being otherwise scantily clad.

"Golly, this is some boat!" Sinker called from the top of his frail craft, as it swung out into the stream and took the current.

"That's what I say," joined in Chick, radiant with delight when he began to feel the increased momentum of the faster waters.

"This sure is th' stuff!" agreed David, upon his own bunch, taking a twisting motion while rubbing against one of the others. "Say, fellers, I'll bet yer a million dollars that — whoop, look there!" pointing back over the hill whence they came. "There's ole Junkins footin' it down here fer all he's worth!"

The others joined in David's look of consternation at sight of this unwelcome spectacle.

"Gosh, we're in fer it now!" the latter exploded. "We can't steer these blamed things,

an', 'sides, mine's gettin' smaller every minute, anyway."

"So's mine," complained each of the others.

Mr. Junkins, an athletic, middle-aged farmer, raced along the ridge, and cut down to the water ahead of the helpless navigators. While they sailed abreast of him, he uncorked the vials of his wrath with, "Ye gol-darned little pirates!" shaking his fist in a menacing manner. "Guess I've got some on th' pesky critters now that's ben dredgin' my field away. I'll get ye this time, if I hev tew foller ye clean down tew th' Atlantic Ocean!"

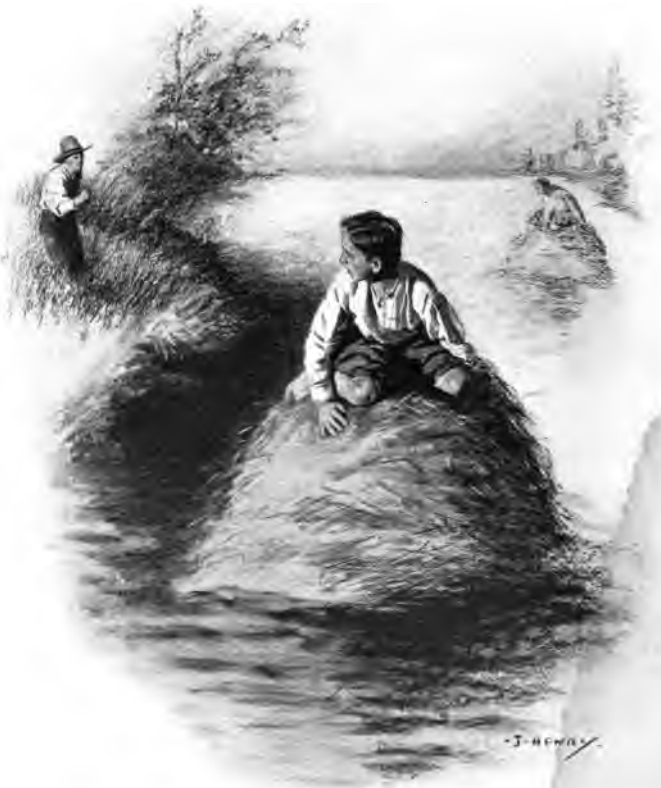
The insecure cockle-shells were fast losing their proportions. The boys clung desperately to their diminishing perches, while looking in mute distress at the outraged farmer trudging along the bank, not twenty feet away.

"Blame it all! I wish these ole vegetable tubs would float 'cross ter th' other side!" growled David. "Ole Chris Columbus didn't have anythin' on us fer sudden death when he hunted out this dinged ole land. Wish he'd never 'scovered it; might er had better sense than 'scoverin' a country with such savages in it as that ole cannibal on th' shore there! I'll bet yer a mil —"

"Dave," suddenly yelled Chick, "get on ter that big tree ahead!"

Sure enough, David, with his eyes riveted in rage on their tormentor, and further engaged in keeping afloat, had failed to notice a huge willow, directly in their course. Against the top branches of this unexpected obstacle, they came in quick collision. What remained of the haycocks disintegrated with marvelous rapidity; part catching here and there in the branches, with a beggarly portion filtering through, and speeding onward in the stream below. The boys, more or less engulfed, caught at the limbs and scrambled aloft. And there the shipwrecked mariners stuck to their roosts with the tenacity of barnacles to a rock-bound coast. From this precarious refuge, swayed by the rush of torrential waters, the unhappy castaways gazed in gloomy silence at their opponent on the bank. This individual viewed their wretched plight with grim satisfaction.

He was not a prepossessing person, with his big, deep jaw, exposing a great area between the slit of a mouth and the bottom of his chin, resembling, in an astonishing degree, the stern of a battleship. Topping this pugilistic section, the



"I'LL GET YE THIS TIME IF I HEV TEW FOLLER YE CLEAN DOWN TEW TH' ATLANTIC OCEAN!"—*Page 291.*

rest of his face was seamed with lines suggesting that he had spent much of his life in forcing others to do things naturally repugnant to them.

This was the sort of man whose clutches the boys saw little hope of escaping, and who now stamped in rage and berated them in language and temper befitting a city teamster: "Come ashore here, ye young cubs, where I kin give ye a good hidin'; ye 'ain't got no more respect fer a man's private prope'ty'n a hog has fer Sunday!"

The three seafarers sat as solemn as owls, in helpless defiance of the angry farmer, who gave further vent to his wrath with, "I tell ye tew come ashore an' get licked intew shape! 'Tain't only this hay-thievin' I wants ye fer, it's diggin' out that swimmin'-hole so I can't get by it with my carts, an' fer buildin' that dam. Every time I tear it down ye goes back tew it like a pup tew an empty sarcer, an' fix it all up again. I'll larn ye, ye little shrimps!"

For a tediously long time, the four retained their relative positions; the irate Mr. Junkins breaking out, every few moments, into tirades of abuse, while his crushed audience held to an unbroken silence.

After the first few bursts of language, David

discerned that the boys were secure from immediate disaster, and a period of cool reflection set in, so that the blistering harangue passed unheeded over his head, as thus he deeply brooded over the gloomy prospect. It was certainly all of an hour before he showed any signs of life, when he became, all at once, very much alert. Cautiously shifting his position and working nearer to his companions, he sharply whispered, "Yer couldn't swim 'cross ter th' other bank, could yer, Sinker?"

"Nope, I reckon not; it's too doggoned far over yonder fer me, why?"

"Well, I didn't s'pose yer could," David whispered on; "only wanted ter be sure we couldn't 'scape that way. Guess Chick an' me could do it, though. But never mind, we gotter do sumpthin' dern soon; it's 'most breakfast time, an' I'm as hungry as a robber. Some one's gotter play th' sacrifice, an' I guess it's up ter me fer th' sake of th' company. Anyhow, I guess I'm th' best swimmer, an' it's goin' ter be a kind of a dangerous game!"

"Well, what's th' dope?" queried Chick, in a hoarse whisper.

"I'm goin' ter drop off into th' water an' swim

'long with th' current as far as I can stick it out, an' I'll bet yer a million dollars he'll follow on th' bank. Then you two kids shin 'long th' limbs an' drop off inter that eddy there near th' edge an' skin ashore. Then yer holler at him an' get him rattled an' chasin' yer so's I can get on shore, too."

" 'Spose we can't string him along so's yer can play safe; where'll yer be then?" Chick interposed, not wishing any bodily harm to overtake his friend other than what he personally administered upon sundry occasions.

" Well, ain't it more needable fer you fellers ter get away than 'tis fer me?" was the heroic explanation.

We will confide to the reader the principal motive that inspired David to this spectacular act of penance. It all lay in there springing to his mind a statement once made by Billy Paradise to the effect, " I don't know as I'd jest hanker tew throw myself inter ole Junkins' claws, if I was ye, but I wouldn't get heart-disease runnin' away; his bark is a tarnation sight worse nor his bite."

" You fellers get on ter yer job, 'cause I'm goin' inter th' briny right now!" David directed, in a somewhat stagy manner. " Don't lose yer

nerve!" as he lowered himself into the swift current. "If he gets yer, jes' tell him yer don't live 'round here, anyway, an' I guess he wouldn't do much."

The last words were shouted recklessly back from the rapidly increasing distance.

Mr. Junkins looked puzzled; he first started after the bobbing little head sweeping rapidly along in the fast current, then hesitated, stopped and gazed a moment at the two still marooned in the tree top; then he seemed to reach a decision for he broke into a run down the stream.

Chick and Sinker plunged to the shore, and made tracks for the higher land running parallel with the water. Here they turned loose a clamorous broadside of taunts and abuse scandalous to hear. But all of no avail; the single-minded Mr. Junkins hung obstinately to his purpose of getting the swimmer. It is possible that he relished, with Indian-like pleasure, the torturing process he was applying to David; or he may have singled him out as the ringleader.

David found swimming in the rushing freshet far easier than he expected. It is true that he might have safely crossed to the farther bank, but such a move would have been fatal to his plans

for playing the valiant hero. So the two continued with sullen determination, while the chorus of malice continued to be poured down from the hillside.

At last, David, breathing hard from exhaustion, gave in, and struggled to the land. There he was dexterously helped to his feet by an iron grip on his shirt-collar from the irascible Mr. Junkins. Billy Paradise was not wholly right in his surmise, for David was promptly set upon his feet and shaken like a rat; shaken until his teeth chattered — chattering, however, partly because of his long exposure in wet clothing and weakness from his exhausting swim. "Quit it, ye-yer der-ned ole bloodsucker!" he managed to gasp out.

"Don't ye gimme none o' yore sass!" was the heated rejoinder, accompanied by another rattling of David's person.

"Well, yer'd bet-ter lem-me go, yer ole cannibal, or my father'll fix yer!"

"Who's he, ye consarned little sass-box?"

"Mr. Hamilton, an' he'll give yer —"

"Be ye Senator Hamilton's boy? Wall, I'm gol-darned glad tew know it. Ye jest come 'long with me, now, an' I'll turn ye over tew th' Senator an' let him do th' rest o' th' lambastin'."

This undesired ending was far from David's calculations. He boiled in bitter resentment upon being yanked over the fields, a sodden and bedraggled little specimen of humanity. Mr. Junkins ceased not to upbraid his captive, while the latter as doggedly spit fire and brimstone in return, reckless of the fact that each of these outbreaks resulted in another painful mauling of his sore body.

Behind, a dripping pair followed in disconsolate silence.

So the grim procession reached the front veranda of the Hamilton house, just as the family and guests were gathering for a bit of invigorating morning air before going in to breakfast. It was not a very cheerful opening for their visit, this vision of their son to the Peachams; nor were the Hamiltons thrown into ecstasies of delight at the disgraceful spectacle of their own son, so bedraggled and in the suggestive grip of Mr. Junkins. Mr. Hamilton waited in dignified silence, which was broken, soon enough, by the impassioned voice of his neighbor: "Look a-here, Senator, I've caught them critters cuttin' up a lot o' didoes down in my field; they's 'bout as pop'lar as a skunk in a hen-house. They floated off a lot

o' my hay in th' freshet, an' I reckon they's th' same gang as ben diggin' away my road tew make a swimmin'-hole!"

"No, you are mistaken in the last," Mr. Hamilton curtly replied, "those other two boys are only visiting here, and never saw your field until this morning."

"What's that?" Mr. Junkins demanded. "Well, I caught 'em thievin' th' hay anyhow, an' they had tew scratch gravel like all-possessed 'fore I got through with 'em. I don't 'spose ye got much control over them other two, but I wants ye tew give this little villain"—giving David another shake by way of emphasis—"a tannin' he'll remember!"

"I'll attend to him and see that he gets what he deserves," returned the unmoved Mr. Hamilton with an expression that told nothing. "You can take your hands off from him now, and leave him to me. I'm sorry you have been troubled! Good morning."

Mr. Junkins muttered under his breath as he trudged down the driveway.

Upon further investigation, Mr. Hamilton decided that David's punishment had been more than sufficient for the crime. In any event, he

had little patience with Mr. Junkins' well-known extreme antagonism towards all boys and their ways.

Upon reaching their rooms, in order to effect a very needful change of clothing, David threw himself on to a bed in a most disconsolate attitude. After gently feeling of his cheeks with the tips of his fingers, he began to blow like a spouting whale.

"What in time's th' matter with you?" Chick inquired, in a tone of amazement.

"Well, I guess you'd blow, if every tooth in yore head 'ud been rattled loose by a mean ole gink like that. Every tooth I've got feels like it's only jes' hangin' by a thread, an' I'm seein' how many I can blow out, so's not ter have ter go ter any blamed ole dentist."

CHAPTER XXI

AN UNUSUAL ATHLETIC CONTEST

"SAY, Billy Paradise," David began in a tone that indicated that there was something troubling him, "yer know those chickens I bought three or four weeks ago?"

"I reckon I does," was the slow reply, looking at the boy in a suspicious way. "'Sposin' I does, what of it?"

"Well, they cost me a dollar."

"Mebbe so."

"An' I thought maybe yer'd like ter buy 'em fer th' farm. I heard Father say that we didn't hatch any too many this spring."

"Well, mebbe so," the foreman remarked, with aggravating deliberation, "but them chicks ain't as new as they was when ye bo't 'em. They're what ye might call as second-hand birds!"

David appeared puzzled. He kneaded his knuckles into his little round head in a fashion

that gave promise of success in bread-making. Billy Paradise watched him covertly while sand-papering the ox-goad he was shaping. At last David protested, "Well, anyway, they're 'bout as good as new. I ain't used 'em much of any."

A ghost of a smile flickered across Billy Paradise's face as he proposed, "Mebbe if ye'd give me yer warrant in writin', signed an' witnessed, that yer 'ain't, an' guarantee 'em as good as new — that is, ye know, fer all practical purposes, I'd give ye ninety-five cents fer 'em!"

"When?" David quickly demanded.

"Soon's ye give me th' warrant."

"I gotter write it?"

"Yep."

"Gosh!"

With the aid of his two friends, who had been interested listeners of the dickering, the following legal document was forthcoming, but not without much argument and a great variety of opinions and suggestions:

"Honest injun. The chickens I sold Mr. Billy Paradise at an orful sacrafice for only $.95 has only been used about 3 weeks and are almost

as good as new ones. I hope to die if it ain't true. Honest and true, black and blue.

"DAVID HAMILTON, ESQUIRE.

"We saw him do it.
"MARK PEACHAM, *alias* SINKER,
"CHARLES GERRISH, *alias* CHICK."

The "esquire" was Sinker's idea; a touch of Southern dignity.

David thought it would not be binding unless beginning in some such form as, "I bet you a million dollars." He was slow to allow that any less a declaration of faith would be acceptable to the purchaser.

The transaction was concluded, however, and the boys' depleted treasury provided with some ready cash.

David sought his father, who, with some of the guests, was about to drive to the village. To him he tendered twenty-five cents with the request for its investment in gum.

Although Mr. Hamilton, as already hinted, made a tolerable allowance for the ways of youth, he had a strong aversion to the gum-chewing habit, and had long tried to devise a scheme to drive it out of David's system. He had never

openly opposed the custom, thinking to only force the boy to secret activities in that line. A promising plan now flashed into his head, and he said, benevolently:

"No, keep your money, David. I'll buy the gum to-day. I've an idea that it would be a nice thing for you to have a gum party as a means of entertaining your friends. We'll have it this morning at eleven o'clock in the dining-room. Ask Nancy to be there, and," after a moment's thought, "yes, I think you better bring Roulette along."

"Yessir, we'll all be there, sure!" David gleefully cried. "Better get lots diff'ent flavors. I like pep'mint, Chick wants check'berry, an' Sinker 'druther have that ole spruce kind!"

"All right; be on time now!" his father called back, as the carriage rolled away.

"Say, I think that'll be quite th' fun!" voiced Chick in pleasant expectation.

"Oh, my dad ain't so bad!" David laughed. "I'll fight any one here who says he's got a better dad than mine!"

The others laughed good-naturedly. They felt no inclination to argue the subject, having a very friendly feeling towards Mr. Hamilton, and hold-

ing a well-grounded belief that he always "played fair."

They returned to Billy Paradise, and climbed on to boxes and barrels about the carpenter's shop the better to listen to his gossip.

"Here, you kids, slip these things down yer gullets," chirped David, throwing each a lemon-drop drawn from a forgotten store he had just discovered in one of his pockets.

"Don't ye boys ever do anythin' but eat pisen stuff like that?" the foreman remonstrated. "Ye'll be worse'n old Lunt 'fore ye knows it!"

"What's th' matter with him?" queried David, eyeing the other doubtfully.

"Well, he's all but done fer. They do say he lived so high when he was young — jest like ye're all doin'— that it brung on th' shakin' palsy long 'fore his time. He gotter shakin' so he couldn't make 'em understand fer th' stutterin', an' it must hev gone hard with him, 'cause he was th' darndest talker an' bossiest ole cuss in th' whole county!"

"What'd he do ter make 'em understand?" Chick inquired.

"Wall, he tried writin' fur a spell, but then his hands got ter shakin' so he had tew give that up.

Then some one thought o' them new fangled things yer father's sec'tary thumps like a piany, David — a typewritin' machine — an' as ole Lunt's rich an' got lots o' money, tho' he does hate tew part with it like all-possessed, he bo't one on 'em. Reckon he'd given up a sight more rather'n lose th' power of ding-dongin' at th' rest o' th' family. Well, as I was a-sayin', he got th' pesky thing home, all bo't an' paid fur, an' sat down tew pound out a piece o' his mind. An' what d'ye think! he couldn't do it, his hands shook so; he'd hit th' same letter so tarnation many times that he was what ye might call a-stutterin' on th' typewriter, an' no one could read it."

David distributed another round of lemon-drops — eyeing Billy Paradise in a dubious way.

"That's it, go on an' fill yer insides up with that stuff — worse'n rough-on-rats fur yer in th' long run! No wonder ye're all so little; jest like little runts!"

"Say, Billy Paradise, is a 'runt' what yer call that little pig yer said I could call mine?"

"Yep."

"It's th' littlest one in th' pen, an' I thought it'd be fine ter own it, but it don't grow any. What'll I do?"

"Don't ye know how tew make a runt grow?"

"Don't know as I do."

"Easiest thing in th' world! I thought ye knew, an' were takin' care o' that pig or I'd tended tew it myself."

"Well, what'll I do, then?"

"All ye has ter do is ter go right down tew th' Crick, out back th' barn, an' get a bucket o' salt water an' pour over him once a day; that'll make him itch so he'll scratch his skin, an' thet'll make it stretch so he can get room tew grow. Ye see, he's what ye call hidebound."

David scrutinized the old man with a doubtful expression, but as the serious countenance indicated nothing suspicious, the boy slid down from his barrel with, "Come on now, fellers, let's try it!"

The little pig was soon dodging about the pen with squeals of surprise; shooting here and there with the unexpected jerky movements of a sputtering Roman-candle. No visible scratching being discernible after the baptism, the heated boys retired in disgust to collect Nancy Packard and Roulette, and then gathered in the dining-room prepared for the gum-chewing party.

They had not long to wait. Mr. Hamilton

soon came cheerily in, accompanied by Mr. Peacham and other smiling visitors.

"All ready, now!" the former laughed, throwing a large package of gum onto the table. "Draw up your chairs and get ready for the start! Nancy, you give every one several pieces of the kind of gum they want! We'll start in just one minute; eleven o'clock to the second!"

All were in readiness. "Now, go!" was the brisk command. "Chew hard! each keep count of the number of chews, and the one that wins will get a prize!"

"How'll we decide it?" mumbled David, working like a trip-hammer.

"The one who chews the greatest number of times to the minute and keeps it up th' longest wins," Mr. Hamilton explained.

"New gum when we want it?" grunted his son.

"As often as you wish. Now, Peacham, and the rest of you that are not in the game, sit 'round and see that there's fair play!" Then, after placing a piece of blank paper and a pencil in front of each contestant, he went on, "Every time you count five hundred put a mark on your sheets."

The game waxed fast and furious. The noise was not unlike that from the sputtering of frying doughnuts in deep fat. The audience lent spirit to the occasion by repeated applause and shouts of encouragement to those showing the best speed, while they sarcastically chided the more deliberate. David soon renewed his supply without losing stroke, and decorated the under-side of the table with one score. Roulette sat with a new piece poised in one hand ready to make the lightning change, when David surreptitiously kicked her on the shin evoking a spasm of wrath and the loss of at least ten motions. At this, Nancy Packard choked with laughter and lost her chew on the floor. David's features showed no signs of his feelings; he worked on relentlessly. Chick and Sinker were both doing good service, and jotting down their five hundred marks with astonishing regularity.

The quarter-hour rang out from the old hall clock. Roulette muttered under her breath, her face dripping with perspiration: "If des yere show keeps up much longer, I'm gwin' ter come mighty nigh gettin' up 'nuff muscle ter do de teeth ack in de circus. My jaw's gettin' pow'ful full of misery; dat's what it is!"

"Come, speed up now!" Mr. Hamilton encouraged. "Roulette, I wouldn't let a lot of boys beat me on working my jaw. What's the matter with you, David?" as he noticed the latter holding on to his face with one hand. "You are not giving out this early, are you?"

So it went on, signs of distress were noticeable on the faces of all the athletes. Ever and anon, little quick intakes of breath, like a low whistling, were heard. Roulette's eyes were protruding with distress. Mr. Hamilton took stock of the occasion and thought it time slowly to unwrap a small package in plain view of all, taking from it a tempting little silver watch — knowing that David for long had fiercely coveted one — and, depositing it in the midst of the "field," he said, "There, that's to be the prize; if one of you girls win, we will exchange it for a woman's watch."

Eleven-thirty chimed out. Sounds of acute anguish arose from sundry persons. David hissed, in an undertone to Sinker, seated on his right, "Gosh, I'm drownin' myself swallowin' so much! my jaws are 'bout busted!"

"Wish they'd quit their rootin'!" expostulated Sinker, when the now organized onlookers gave

three cheers at an unexpected burst of speed on the part of Roulette.

"Gee, I'm gettin' dern sick of this nasty ole pep'mint," gasped David. "Gimme a piece yore check'berry, Chick!"

About eleven-thirty-five, Sinker leaned forward his head, and supported it desolately between his hands, his elbows resting on the table, while perceptibly slowing his jaw-action.

Obdurate alike to cheers to renewed exertions and sarcastic hints of waning strength, he succumbed, scrawling the figures of an unfinished tally on his paper, and staggering from the room. His natural Southern indolence had resulted in his giving way under the tense strain, although it is hardly fair to say that his early dropping out of the race was entirely due to that: He suffered under the unhappy lack of foresight in choosing spruce gum; getting every fresh nugget of that less succulent kind into good working order was a disastrous handicap.

After weakly jotting down another five hundred score, Chick fell by the wayside, and rushed to the door whence sounds arose suggesting that a house-cleaning process of a very searching nature

was being applied to the salivary organs of his person.

Nancy Packard, with cunning forethought, had used discretion and conserved her energies, so she was still in the race, and running well. It is true that she did not have so many scores to her credit, but none of her opponents realized it. Nevertheless, in another five minutes, she gave it up, and joined the boys in the yard.

David glanced uneasily at Roulette, seated close at his left. She was showing signs of exhaustion. David thought well of another kick on the shin, and scientifically administered it.

"Sp-it-z! ugh!" she spluttered, saving her chew by a deft motion of her hand. "You li'l' debbil!" she hoarsely whispered. "You better stop yo' triflin'! Yo' jes' wait!" But she was all in, so after one more despairing effort she beat a feeble retreat, glaring back at her tormentor with eyes betokening a day of reckoning.

David, with the field all to himself, gave a few more chews, in a spirit of bravado as well to round out another five hundred, before, with a perceptible effort to control a weak voice, he declared himself the winner, just as the three-quarters was tolled by the hall clock.

"Not so fast!" his father remonstrated, with a peculiar look. "Remember the rules! The prize goes to the one who chewed the greatest number of times to the minute and kept it up the longest!"

"Yes, but didn't I keep it up th' longest?" protested the exhausted youth.

"I know," his father went on, "but perhaps Roulette chewed more times than you, even if she did stop a few seconds before. Now we'll add up your two scores. I guess no one else came near enough to count in."

Roulette had won by four hundred and sixty-three motions. David, much disconcerted, fled from the room, muttering in angry disgust, "Of all th' blamed luck! I plumb fergot that fool way of countin'. I wish I'd kicked all her shins clean off!"

Maddening peals of laughter followed the discomfited boy when the door slammed behind his retreating form.

On the lawn, he found his two visitors lying prone on their backs, and gently massaging their aching cheeks. Nancy Packard, the one least afflicted, was amusing herself at the boys' expense. Roulette sat off by herself, her face suffused with

rage,— first nursing her scarred shins, and then testing her jaw-action — believing all practical use to have left the latter portion of her anatomy for all time.

David threw himself morosely beside his chums while bitterly complaining, " I'll bet yer a million dollars I'll never chew a doggoned piece of that nasty ole stuff again in all my life! "

His discomfiture was in nowise lessened when, about an hour later, Roulette proudly sauntered by carelessly looking at a new watch with the remark, " Reckon it's 'bout time you chillun went in an' washed up fo' luncheon, it's right clos' ter one o'clock."

" Of all th' gol-derned impudence! " raged the helpless David, hurling at her the contents of a large plate of provender upon which the wistful Alfred was about to banquet. This miscellaneous assortment of garbage ornamented the kitchen door just as Roulette took a flying leap for safety.

" Now I gotter go an' get some more feed! " raged the luckless youth. " Dern her skin! "

CHAPTER XXII

GHOSTS IN THE ATTIC

THANKS to Nancy, David soon eased his mind a trifle on the subject of Roulette. That same evening, after dinner, upon finding the boys swinging contentedly in a hammock, that mercurial young lady drew alongside, questioning, the while, "How'd you kids like to get even with Roulette for doing us all out of that watch?"

"O gee! Would we!" thrilled David. "I'd 'most go ter church three Sundays runnin' ter do any lumptious thing like that!"

"Listen then! You know Roulette sleeps in the room right over mine. Well, most every night I've been hearing a big thump like some one jumping, so I crept up last night and peeked, and what do you 'spose? She got all ready for bed over by the light, then, all of a sudden, put it out, and the next thing I heard was her running like mad, and then the thump again."

"What in time she drivin' at?" asked Chick.

"Well, I asked her this morning," continued Nancy, her face puckered with smiles. "First she looked kind of sheepish, then said she always jumped from as far as she could into bed, so's no ghosts could reach out from underneath and catch her gettin' in. Thinks they live under the bed."

Loud laughter greeted this narrative.

"But how's that goin' ter help us any?" puzzled David.

"Oh, that's too easy!" Nancy resumed. "It's one of those old-fashioned beds; awful high up from the floor, and it's got slats, and—"

"Yes, but what of that?" David interrupted.

"Oh, hush up, an' give Nancy a chance!" Sinker interposed.

"We'll carry off th' mattress and then take out all the slats but the two end ones, and run some twine across to hold up the beddin', an' then when she does the ghost jump, she'll go right through to th' floor!"

"Golly! gee! jim'ny crickets! Oh, ain't that th' stuff!" exulted David. "But s'pose'n she sits down on th' bed or pulls down th' clothes, or any fool thing like that?"

"Well, she won't! she's too awful 'fraid some-

thing underneath's goin' to get her by the legs."

"Come on then!" the impatient avenger chuckled, springing eagerly from the hammock. "If you two others will only watch out fer that little imp, Sinker an' I will fix th' scenery!"

"Oh, we can all go," Nancy returned. "You needn't worry 'bout Roulette; she's helping your mother dress for the card-party they're goin' to have to-night."

In a short time, the schemers had everything arranged, and were once more lounging on the spacious veranda, waiting the time of Roulette's retirement.

"By gracious! I was afraid she was goin' ter butt in on us once," Sinker remarked, whistling in relief.

So the time was chatted away in joyful confidence of hard times ahead for Roulette. About nine o'clock, a tour of investigation on the part of Nancy warned them that it was time to be up and doing, so the four tiptoed to the hall outside of Roulette's bedroom, where they posted themselves, each alert under the influence of tense waiting.

Pretty soon, Nancy, with her ear glued to the door-jamb, cautiously whispered, "She's blown

out the light." The rush instantly followed, while all the plotters held their breath in anxious hopefulness. Then the crash; a crash that shook the house-top. With no perceptible lapse of time, there poured forth a torrential mixture of rage and fear followed by cries of, "Oh, misser ghost, doan' yer tech me! Lemme 'lone; I nebber done nuffin' ter yer! Fo' th' Lawd, I didn't!" the last being muffled as the quivering girl rolled herself up in a sheet and huddled against the wall.

"Pull th' wire, quick, Dave!" Nancy sharply whispered. Then a device of the former's own contriving was put into effect. The bed, with its large casters, began to roll across the floor. One wild shriek of protest! a flying creature wrapped recklessly in a tattered sheet; a black kinky head with wild protruding eyes, haunted and terrified; a dashing down the stairs and into the card room with the quiet tables of players: "Oh, Miss Hamilton," she wailed in a voice of awe, "save me from de ghostes! dey done ketch me dis time. Save me! Save me!" falling on to the floor and throwing her arms about her mistress's knees in terrified appeal.

The players could do naught but hold their sides with suffocating mirth at so grotesque an inter-

ruption. Mrs. Hamilton discovered the four conspirators peeking in from the hall, and at once divined somewhere near the truth of the affair. She led away the chattering figure, while retaining her own dignity with a perceptible effort. Nancy and the boys retreated in advance to the second hall. As Mrs. Hamilton followed, they heard her comforting the little "handmaiden" with, "It's nothing, Roulette; just some prank of Nancy and the boys. I'll go up with you and you will soon see for yourself!"

"Doan', Missus, I 'clar ter goodness, I never kin go nigh dat ghosty room again! It am all full of 'em. I done see—"

Just then, they came in sight of our four friends, lined up to "view the parade," using Chick's words. "Got on yore party clothes?" David jibed with a triumphant grin. "Seem ter have left yore watch at home."

Roulette's state of fright instantly changed to one of deadly belligerency. She raged by, in perfect comprehension of the whole trick; in a tumult of bursting antipathy, she glared at the grinning quartette. When the bed had been examined, there was no further need to allay the spell of ghosts. Roulette had a very clear vision of the

how and why, and was only waiting for Mrs. Hamilton's departure to give free expression to her feelings. This was much applauded by the appreciative audience outside.

The next day, when Roulette chanced to encounter Billy Paradise, winnowing some peas for a late planting, he slowly drawled, "Hearn tell that there's ghosts in th' top o' th' ole house. Kind er glad I sleep out in th' cottage!"

"It's all dem rascally kids. I'll ketch up wid 'em yet!" was the smarting response. "Twa'n't no ghosts."

"They do say as how a bit o' raw onion rubbed all over th' inside a pillow-case is a good thing ter keep ghosts away!"

For an instant, Roulette looked at the solemn old man, ere there came to her eyes a sparkle suggestive of a blissful glimpse into the future.

The next morning, when the boys were interested spectators of Billy Paradise taking a grim satisfaction in the execution of a pan of potato bugs by covering them with kerosene, they heard him complain, "Pesky critters! Good riddance ter bad rubbish!" Then, a few moments later, half to himself, "They do say as how warm milk is a purty good thing fer sore eyes."

"Who's got sore eyes?" bristled David.

"Don't know as anybody hez. Thought mebbe as there's so many red eyes 'round here thar might mebbe be a little soreness in some o' 'em. But I reckin it's jest my 'magination. Mebbe it all comes o' this late studyin' Sunday-school lessons nights. See Nancy's took ter it, too, 'cause I kinder noticed her peepers wur a trifle red 'bout an hour ago. Glad yer all turned so religious. Neighborhood'll be a tarnation sight better fur it!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A FRUITLESS DAY

"THERE's some people as I c'd mention whose hull lives has ben jest one continuous round o' joy an' waste!" asserted Billy Paradise, in a leisurely manner, from his seat on the chopping block where he was mending a broken ox-muzzle. "I'll wager when I gets this contrivance on thet fidgerty off-ox he won't do no more browsin' under th' yoke!"

The last observation did not for an instant lead David's mind astray from the main point of the foregoing remark, for he at once demanded, "Who's that yer talkin' 'bout?"

"Star, that ornery off —"

"O shucks! I don't mean any ole ox," the boy cut in; "it's 'bout some one that wasn't very strong on th' savin' idea."

"Did I say anythin' 'bout sich? Wall, mebbe I did; 'reckin I must 'er ben thinkin' 'bout Semp Russ!"

"There goes Nancy Packard over yonder," announced Sinker. "Aren't she all swelled up this mornin'!"

"She's darn nice!" Chick declared, gazing tenderly after the winsome girl. "I'd like ter be as nice as she is!"

Billy Paradise peered inquiringly at the first speaker for an instant, before remarking, "Didn't obsarve she was so awful much swollen when I—"

"Oh, he means dressed up fit ter kill," David interposed, plainly disgusted at the other's lack of understanding of the best English, "but what 'bout Lemp Suss?"

"Semp Russ, I reckin ye means?"

"Yes, 'course, that's what I said, Lemp Suss. Tell us 'bout him! Where's he live?"

"Down th' bottom o' th' river," came the indefinite answer.

"What d'jer mean by that?" was the puzzled question.

Billy Paradise took this occasion to seize the end of a piece of wire with his teeth, so it was some moments before he could find it convenient to squeeze out the words, "Drowned, an' they 'ain't got his body yet!"

"Where? When? Hurry up an' tell us all 'bout it. Quick!" Chick urged excitedly.

"Jest take holt that piece o' wire, one ye youngsters," Billy Paradise directed with aggravating deliberation; "if we don't fix this ox —"

"When'd Lemp Suss get drowned?" David persisted, in his turn.

"Didn't know he ever was drowned."

"Well, didn't yer say —"

"Oh, ye mean's Semp Russ; wall, th' fore part o' last week, that good-fer-nuthin' cuss was out eel-spearin'; reckin he paid more 'tention tew his cider jug'n he did th' eels. Th' kind o' pizen his kind feeds tew their insides kills more people'n unloaded guns. Howsomever, he fell outer his skiff an' — jes give me 'nuther holt on thet wire end!"

"Oh, go on with yer story!" David fretted under the impulse of strong excitement. "We can't work here all day!"

"Niver knew ye did work!" was all the consolation David obtained. "Ye're allus as busy as a back yard ant tryin' tew dodge it! That four-legged, moth-eaten animul lyin' thar thet ye calls a dog ain't any fuller o' fleas'n ye are o' ideas tew get outter church an' work!"

"He ain't got fleas, an' he ain't moth-eaten, an' he's th' thoroughbrededest dog in th' State!" the proud owner hotly protested.

"Oh, come on, Dave!" Chick put in. "Let him go on 'bout that feller in th' boat!"

After an exasperating delay, the narrator resumed, "Wall, he niver kum up. I happened by jest as they wur a-draggin' th' river fer his wuthless body. All th' neighbors had dropped their work an' wur givin' a hand. After watchin' 'em a spell, I ses, 'Ye all go back tew yer hayin', an' don't waste no more time on thet jailbird! Jest come 'round agin in ten days; th' gall-bag'll bust at th' end o' ten days an th' body'll rise agin.'"

"Did they go home?" inquired Sinker.

"Sartin sure."

"When's th' ten days up?" eagerly demanded David, with an awe-struck look.

"Lemme see;" the foreman pondered, slowly pulling out a huge watch and studying it for a tediously long time. "In 'bout five minutes."

David landed on his feet with a jump. "Hurry, fellers! Come on quick! Ain't got a second ter lose!"

After getting a good start, he came to a sudden

stop and shouted back, " Say, where'd Lemp Suss get drowned? "

" Niver did get drowned; don't know any sich man."

" Blame it all! " stamped the flushed youth, " I mean th' man yer were jes' tellin' us 'bout."

" Oh, Semp Russ! down by the toll-bridge."

To Mr. Hamilton's query as to why the boys were so late to dinner that night, David returned, " Been down watchin' 'em grub fer Lemp Suss's body."

" Who? "

" Lemp Suss."

" Oh! " his father smiled, with a gleam of understanding. " Did they get him? "

" No, sir, an' we sat there most all day waitin' fer th' gall-bag ter bust."

Mr. Hamilton looked at him curiously for a moment, and then left the table, where the half-famished trio were ravenously making up for lost time. This last was a matter of some consequence for they had also gone without their luncheon. Their absence at that time, likewise, had given their elders more than passing concern.

After the first pangs of hunger were somewhat

appeased, and David had calmed down a trifle, his face wore a more satisfied expression as he mumbled with his mouth over-full, "Golly! don't this taste good! Tastes like other people's food!"

"What d'yer mean by that?" asked Sinker in an indistinct voice.

"Well, don't th' feed yer get at other fellers' houses 'most always taste better'n yore own?" was the convincing bit of philosophy in reply.

A little later, sitting in the hollow of a ledge back of the barn, with their sweet-fern cigars aglow, David relieved his mind of a great burden of doubt: "Say!" he reasoned, with ire in his voice, "what's a gall-bag, anyhow?"

"Search me!" was the illuminating response from Chick.

"Don't gall mean 'cheek' or 'nerve' or sumpthin' like that?" David considered with rising feeling. "Guess if yer carry it stowed away inside yer somewheres in a bag, Billy Paradise must have one big nuff ter blow up an' bust 'thout his goin' ter th' trouble of gettin' drowned! Don't yer 'spose if there'd bin anythin' in that gall-bustin' scheme he'd ben right down there on th' front row of bleachers himself? By hookey! I'll get even with him fer that!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TALE OF THE OLD SHERIFF

DAVID and his two visitors had made exhaustive preparations for a day's fishing, but the morning set for the adventure broke gloomy, and the weather looked forbidding. Dressing as they ran, they went in quest of Billy Paradise, asking in chorus, "D'yer think it's goin' ter rain, Billy?"

Now this sage individual greatly disliked being placed in a position where he could not give a definite answer upon any subject that might properly be considered within his field of experience. Upon this particular morning, the outlook was of such a dubious nature that the weather-wise found little encouragement for safe predictions. Therefore, as a defensive measure, Billy Paradise cautiously replied, "Don't know; 'ain't looked up yit."

"Well, take a look quick, can't yer!" David fretted.

"Mebbe so," was the exasperating reply, "but

Andrew Simpkins allus ses it's goin' tew rain when ye see th' leaves turn right up'ards; ye can see thet's what they's doin' now."

"Jes' our dern luck!" grumbled David.

"Dunno as I'd say thet," Billy Paradise resumed. "Ole Jim Bragden useter say thet when ther' ain't no dew in th' mornin' ye're goin' tew hev er storm; an' this mornin' ther' was er master lot o' dew, so I reckin' there'll be fair weather!"

"Bully!" cried David. "Come on, fellers, quick, an—!"

"Not so fast! Not so fast!" interrupted the prophet. "'Cause thet ole close-fisted Junkins, up th' road, tole me as he went by early this mornin' lookin' fur er breachy cow, thet he seen er monster big sun-dog which's er sure sign o' foul weather."

"Blame it all!" exploded the boy, as he threw himself recklessly into a seat on the chopping-block, his face falling with discouragement. "Ain't that th' derndest!"

"Howsomever," Billy continued, "I seen Alf Tinker last night an', ses he, 'Ye tell th' Senator we're goin' tew hev er week o' fair weather, sartin, an' he needn't be afeared tew go right on with his hayin'!'"

"All right, that's th' stuff!" cried David, jumping up gaily with returning confidence. "Get a move on you kids, an'—!"

"By ginger!" again broke in the foreman, casting his eyes aloft for the first time since the conversation began, "this does look like er wet one! I wonder if th' tide's comin' in!"

David chased off to the far end of the barn where he could see the Creek, and came running back with what he considered the hopeful news, "Yep, Billy, it's comin' in."

"Then she'll come on tew rain, an' rain purty nigh all day. Thet's what she done yestiddy; th' tide come in, an' th' rain she come with it."

After all these fitful ups and downs, the boys were so wrought up with a mixture of hope and doubt, that they gave the problem up and stood in their tracks, images of indecision. David had not yet found time to get into his coat, so now, in further vexation of spirit, he angrily threw it upon the ground while muttering his keen disappointment.

"Don't do thet!" Billy Paradise cautioned. "If ye throw yore coat down wrong-sid' up, ther's sure tew be foul weather!"

David rescued the offending garment with

desperate agility, and hastened to clothe himself in it.

"Lemme see!" Billy Paradise once more went on. "What day is it?"

"Friday," Sinker informed him.

"I'll bet ye! Friday's allus th' fairest or foulest day o' th' week! Mebbe it'll clear yet, an' then agin it mightn't. Arter th' rain drawed off yestiddy arternoon, I noticed thet th' sun was a-drawin' water. Thet's er sure sign o' change; liable tew get all kinds o' weather! Now ye kin tell jest what tew do!"

The three friends looked at one another in a maze of perplexity, David, the while, kicking viciously at the chopping-block as an antidote to mental torment beyond the experience of ordinary mortals.

But their counselor continued: "Mebbe it'll come off clear to'ds night ag'in ter day, an' mebbe it'd be so as I c'd take ye all poutin' up tew Bow Pond, arter th' chores are done up ter night; thet is, if so be it ye'd be allowed tew set up arter sundown."

"Oh, would yer, Billy?" rejoiced David. "We'd help yer all day with yer work if yer would!"

"Hump! Work! I want tew know! Wall, ye go an' get yoreselves lookin' 'spectable fer breakfast, an' we'll see!"

Although no great measure of credit could be awarded the volunteer crew, as the result of their day's industry, nevertheless, Billy Paradise drove over the hills about an hour before sunset that evening with three expectant boys crowded onto the rear seat of an old farm-wagon. The day had been one of alternate rain and sunshine — an "open-an'-shet day," in the driver's descriptive language — but towards evening the sun seemed to have the better of it, when the last cloud disappeared.

"Had any luck up ter th' pond this year?" inquired Chick.

"Only ben once!"

"Get any then?"

"Wall," was the slow reply, "if I'd ketched th' one I went arter an' one more I'd had tew."

His auditors looked at one another in some doubt as to his meaning.

"Don't know as we'll hev much luck ter-night," was the next remark from the front seat. "Fish allus bite best on Sundays."

Then, after a pause. "Ye know ole Jim Lar-

kin, up tew th' village, David? Wall, he's er great picker'l-fisher, Jim is, an' he's got er mighty big heart, too. Ther' wur er poor family as lived nigh tew Jim an' he'd ben sendin' picker'l tew 'em every time he ketched any. One day, seein' one o' th' children as belonged tew thet family, he asked if they didn't want some more. Th' lad kind o' surprised Jim, 'cause he ses: 'No, thankee, we's purty well fished up.' "

When the sun was well below the horizon and the stillness of night rested upon the earth, Billy Paradise had his charges advantageously distributed about a large flat-bottomed boat, anchored in a cove of his own experienced selection; one with just the right kind of a muddy bottom.

"Come off tew be a fair night, arter all!" he observed, looking about him. "See th' moonbeams all spraddled out o'er th' water; kind o' purty, ain't they?"

At "hornpouting" the old man was in his element; in that line he had no peer in those parts. Well did the prickly "bull-heads" bite on this night, and rapidly did their flopping forms carpet the bottom of the boat. Nevertheless, the guide did not appear to be entirely satisfied, although, upon the part of the boys, it left nothing to be

desired. "Not much luck ter-night, boys," the former grumbled, after there were at least a hundred "pouts" aboard.

Every now and then, one of the fish, with its great tenacity to life, would give a splash in the half-inch or so of water that had invaded the leaky scow. Then some boy's face would gleam in the flare of the torch, as he leaned forward to gaze curiously at the struggling victim.

"Hornpouts live th' longest out th' water," Billy Paradise observed. "No good tew fish 'onless th' signs is right," he soon resumed, deftly inserting a finger into the gaping mouth of a fresh catch, the better to remove the hook without danger from the sharp horns. "Signs ain't right now; jest ye look in th' almanac! Signs gotter be in th' belly tew ketch fish as ye ortter! If ye'd only ben up with me last season ye'd seen some reel good poutin'. I got th' boat kivererd 'bout six inches deep all o'er th' bottom when my bait gin out, an' th' pouts wur bitin' turrible hungry. Wall, I jest picked up one on 'em jumpin critters, clipped er piece outen his side fur bait, an' threw him back over-board. Why, thet darned little cuss was back on th' hook ag'in quicker'n er bull kin kick!"

"Gorry!" remarked Chick, while at the same instant David ejaculated, when trying to unhook another fish, "Gosh-dern it all, th' head of that ding-busted ole cat-fish is a regular cushion full of pins all stuck in th' wrong way!"

Not long after, the fish ceased to bite and as quickly as they had begun. For some time, each patient angler answered in the negative to the time-honored question of "What luck?" Billy soon drew in his line and lighted his pipe from the torch. This means of attracting the horn-pouts, he extinguished, for some reason not clear to the others, following with the statement, "Used tew live o'er ther' on th' east shore th' pond years ago when I was sheriff o' this 'ere county!"

"Didn't know yer ever were sheriff!" David asserted, with new respect depicted in his tone. "Ever see a murderer?"

"Yes, grists o' 'em, but th' wust o' th' lot was er big dangerous cuss named Tom Gallon. An' er good name it was fur him, 'cause he c'd hole a gallon er cider 'most any time."

"Tell us 'bout it quick!" breathlessly demanded David.

"Wall, he killed er man, an' hid his body.

Anyhow, thet's what we all 'spected. So, at last, I dug Tom 'outen th' celler in an ole tumble-down deserted house back in th' woods to'ds th' mountain, an' took him hum tew live with me fur a spell."

"Yer did!" cried Sinker in anxious admiration.

"Yes, ye see ther' warn't no dead sartin' proof he done it, an' I wanted tew worry er confession outen him. I had er gun on me all th' time, an' when I went tew bed I made him get in alongside with one wrist handcuffed tew mine."

"Gee whizz! what nerve!" Chick exclaimed. "Didn't he try ter do yer?"

"Yes, once he did. I was a-settin' smokin', an' clean fergot all 'bout er big clasp-knife I uster keep on th' mantel-piece. He was settin' kinder back o' me, so he sneaked 'round an' got th' knife an' had it raised right top my head 'fore I got on tew what th' murderous cuss was a-drivin' at."

Billy Paradise stopped to refill and light his pipe.

"Hurry up an' go on 'gain!" fumed David, wriggling in his anxiety. "Did he kill yer?"

"Nope, not yet, 'cause I swung my gun on him when his hand was jest ready ter do th' red-

handed deed. Wall, 'bout th' third day, he giv' in an' tole me th' whole turrible tale, an' jest whar he'd hid th' corpse; right ther'," pointing over David's head.

"Gee!" gasped Chick, swallowing painfully as he looked uneasily out into the shadows. "What d'jer do 'bout it?"

"It was er turrible stormy night when I worrited th' bloody tale outen th' heartless critter. It was 'long 'bout ten o'clock, I reckin, an' I warn't a-hankerin' tew go huntin' dead bodies at any sich time. But I was feared he'd get his nerve back come daylight an' refuse tew show me th' hidin'-place, so I set out on th' onpleasant job right then an' ther'. I had my gun an' er lantern an' th' dord-dasted cowed murderer tew show th' way. He was all gone tew pieces by then. I had him handcuffed on tew th' end o' er trace-chain which I wound 'round my left wrist tew hole th' foul fiend, an' me taggin' 'long behind."

"By hickory!" Chick quavered, in a voice of horror. "None of that kind of follow th' leader fer me!"

"Go on, quick!" urged David in tremulous tones.

"Well, we soused along in th' rain, th' light from th' lantern showin' his face all puckered with fright. Round by th' head o' th' pond an' on tew th' edge o' th' woods right round this 'ere cove he led me!"

"By gum!" David hoarsely whispered. "Let's move out inter th' pond! Fish ain't bitin' any more here!"

"Yes, we better had, right now!" urged Sinker, in a like state of tremor. "Might have better luck out yonder!"

"Reckin so?" queried the ex-sheriff. "Ther's one tuggin' at yer line now, David; haul him in! As I was a-sayin', we fetched up at th' edge o' th' woods, an' ther' th' darned coward's last ounce o' courage oozed clean outen him. He got right down on his knees in th' mud, an' begged me not tew make him go inter th' grewsome forest an' see th' cold, stark carcass lyin' ther' in all th' dismal wet. I thought er spell, an' kind o' suspicioned as how that pesky skunk might lead me er wrong scent if I pushed him. So I wheedled him intew tellin' me as best he c'd whar' th' body lay buried, an' then passed th' chain round er six-inch maple an' left him handcuffed ther' all a-shakin' an' chatterin' an' sick from fear; he didn't hev a

speck o' gumption left. It must be thet same tree, now growed up, that ye can see loomin' up on th' shore 'bout fifty feet away ther' right back o' ye David."

The last named gave a perceptible jump. "Let's be goin'," he gasped, dropping his rod in haste and beginning to heave fiercely at the anchor. "You know Mother said not ter be out too late."

"Ketch hole o' yer pole quick an' pull in thet pout thet's tryin' tew run away with it," was the quick warning. "As I was a-tellin' ye, I took th' lantern an' picked my way inter th' dark, dismal, spooky woods o'er ther', jest by David's head, an'—"

"Say," chattered David, "any feller got a match? I want ter light a cigar."

Sinker furnished the light, while each of the three tremblingly placed a sweet-fern cigar between his lips, their blanched faces making a strange picture as they clustered about the flickering match.

"Good thing tew stiddy yer nerves, baccy is!" the old man remarked.

"Whose nerves?" snorted David.

"Wall," the other once more took up the nar-

rative, "purty soon I stumbled my way 'long 'til I reached er great big 'blow-down' thet I wanted tew find; one o' them ole pumpkin-pines thet was er good-sized tree when George Washington was er baby. It was right nigh th' shore ther', 'bout seventy-five feet away from us wher' we be now, jest tew th' left o' th' bow!"

David moved uneasily and urged, "Let's light th' torch 'gain; perhaps th' hornpout'd bite better!"

"Ye won't get no more tew-night," Billy Paradise declared. "Signs ain't right. But as I was a-sayin', th' roots er thet tree stood right up on edge, an' left er big hole 'neath 'em, an' ther' was whar I 'spected tew find th' mangled body. Ye better believe I didn't hanker arter th' job er lot, but I spunked up er bit an' began ter dig, an', bimeby, I teched sumpin' that felt corpse-like, so I got down an' scraped away with my hands an', sure enough, purty soon I felt sumpin' cold an' clammy, an—"

At that precise point of his narrative, the lonesome, ghostly, eerie cry of a loon sounded, wail-like, close to the boat; a cry so startling and soul-stirring that the cold-sweat poured out on the old sheriff's auditors and all three cried out in terror.

David hauled at the anchor spasmodically, while shouting, "Hurry, there's th' ghost callin' now, let's get outer this spooky place quicker'n lightnin'!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE BOYS LUNCH UNDER STRANGE CIRCUMSTANCES

"Don't scuff, David!"

"No'm," as he came to a sudden stop in the comfortable hall, where his mother was taking advantage of a brief interval, when there were no guests, for a period of restful reading. Mr. and Mrs. Peacham had departed, leaving Sinker to prolong his visit for the remainder of the summer vacation. They welcomed the invitation as they were loath to take him back to the hot South earlier than necessary. It is needless to dwell upon the contentment with which the boys viewed this happy decision.

After a protracted spell of serious thought, David resumed, "Say, when'll Dad be through readin' his paper?"

"Pretty soon, now, I imagine. Why?"

"Oh, nothin' much," with an evasive air; "jes'

want ter see him on business. Guess I'll wait fer him!"

Mrs. Hamilton, with a speculative look, resumed her book, and was soon so absorbed in its contents that she completely lost track of David. Thus some time passed before she glanced his way and observed him industriously associated with a box of candy.

"David!" she called.

"Yes'm!" putting down the box with a guilty air.

"Bring me that candy!" she commanded. "If there is any candy!"

"Yes'm," handing it to her with some hesitation.

"What have you been doing to this?" Mrs. Hamilton asked with a puzzled expression.

"Well, ain't it always jes' a chance-shot what yer goin' ter strike inter when yer bite one of 'em fashionable all-frilled out pieces? Well, I jes' thought it'd make it easier fer every one if I took a little bite out of each piece so yer could see what's inside an' not mess yer mouth all up with some lemony ole thing yer didn't like!"

"David Hamilton! do you mean that you have bitten into every piece of —?"

"Scuse me, mother, but I guess Dad 'spects me 'bout now!" the family benefactor interrupted, rushing down the hall and disappearing into his father's study.

The upshot of this business call was that David, who, with his two friends, had really worked very creditably for the last week of haying, reaped a hoped-for reward. He received permission to go camping and the necessary financial assistance to carry the project through.

For over a year, David had been saving faithfully in order to buy a canoe that was stowed away in a neighboring barn. No extremity in the lack of funds had ever been so dire as to cause him to withdraw money from this hoard when once placed in it. The canoe was one of genuine birch-bark construction, made by the Indians of Maine, and taken by the farmer for debt, some years before.

David needed the canoe now, of all times, for the camping trip, but the day before his business call upon Mr. Hamilton he was one dollar short the needed amount. Everything he had the courage to sacrifice had been converted into cash, yet he was one dollar short, so, in desperation, he fell back on Billy Paradise with a proposition to sell

him a pair of greatly prized ducks for the bargain price of the needed dollar. This was finally accomplished, but not without some mental schooling on the part of the seller, the foreman remarking, in a tolerant tone, as he closed the trade, "Nawthin' in 'em! Might jest's well giv ye th' money. Ducks cost 'bout all ye get outen 'em! They keep er man feedin' 'em grain with a shovel!"

However, the next day, when the craft had been paid for, Billy Paradise hitched up a farm horse, and, besides carting the canoe home for the boys, devoted some hours to melting tar and caulking up its many seams and leaks. His work was interwoven with a continual remonstrance at the "tarnation risk o' goin' tew sea in sich a peapod." But the task was well done, and towards sunset, when the launching took place in the creek midst great hopes, and not a drop of water leaked through, there was huge rejoicing.

Two days later, the preparations were finally completed, and all was in readiness for the start. At an hour so early that the glimmer of the stars had scarcely faded before the gathering light in the east, Billy Paradise, with canoe and equipment loaded on a large wagon, headed eastward,

with the three boys trudging gaily on behind. Some two miles distance brought them to the river's bank, where the old foreman helped them off, and afterwards stood on the shore watching them paddle out into the stream.

"Good-by, Billy! Yer ain't so bad!" David called back. Very fond of the old man was David! "Take good care of Alfred, an' don't let th' cats claw him!"

"Good luck tew ye!" came from the shore. "Don't see as how ye three infants goin' tew get 'long 'thout me tew show ye where tew fish."

More good-bys, and the canoe began to melt into the semi-fog hanging low over the water and only noticeable as the distance increased. "Purty good boys," murmured the old man. "Guess I ortter taken my week's leave now an' gone with 'em. 'Spose sumpin' 'd happen tew 'em!"

And how did his fears come true! Could he have looked ahead, he would, indeed, have been uneasy.

All went well the first day. The night's camp was made in a pine forest, where a deep layer of fragrant pine-needles furnished welcome beds. An abundance of very palatable half-burned food was cooked to fill some great bodily cavities.

The second day was one of vicissitudes. Wading and pushing their load up several small rapids, they reached the foot of a waterfall, in the midst of a small village, and, by inquiry, learned that it would be impossible to navigate the stream for the next few miles, because of the many difficult rapids and falls.

"Come on, one of you fellers," David proposed, "an' help me hire a horse an' wagon ter cart us round."

After an earnest effort, they were discouraged to find that every horse in the place appeared to be engaged in haying; the harvesting of that crop being later than at the Hamilton farm. Besides, the village boasted of no livery stable.

As a desperate expedient, some interested bystander half humorously suggested the hearse.

The boys looked askance at one another for an instant, before David loftily blurted out, "All right, come on! Gotter have sumpthin'; can't stay here all summer!"

There had been no funeral for some weeks, and the local undertaker — combining the business with that of a corner grocery — was glad to put his horse and equipage to some profitable use. "Guess I kin 'commodate ye," he replied to their

proposition, "if so be it ye can get yore boat top th' hearse. My horse ben eatin' his head off fur over a fortni't, now, doin' nawthin'. People ain't dyin' as they useter round these parts!"

The canoe was lashed diagonally across the top. This was necessary because of its being longer than the hearse, so that one end might pass out over the driver's seat. The luggage was packed inside, and the three explorers piled in after.

"This horse has carried more people tew Maple Grove Cemetery un any other animul thet ever cum inter this town!" their department-store friend declared, as his passengers were climbing into the glass-sided vehicle.

"Huh!" laughed Sinker in an undertone, with the Southern boy's natural knowledge of horses. "Should say he had by th' ole crowbait's looks!"

"Golly, don't shut th' doors," protested Chick with loathing, as David made as if to do so while glancing whimsically at Sinker. "Don't smell any too good in here, anyhow!"

Thus they drove out of town under the admiring gaze of a small crowd of street urchins. It was nearly noon when the cortège set forth, so it was not long before the effects of an early

breakfast and a strenuous forenoon began to tell on the appetites of the principal characters of this lively interment. This led to David's proposal that they have a cold luncheon as they rode along.

"Gee, we can't eat in this smelly, spooky ole bus," Chick remonstrated, making a face expressive of his outraged feelings.

"Sure we can," David argued, beginning to unpack the food, while Sinker made a ludicrous attempt to whistle the "Dead March."

"Oh, cut it out!" choked the distressed youth. "Bad 'nuff ter stay housed up in here where millions of dead people been 'thout makin' it seem like we're goin' ter be buried, too. Probably we'll catch small-pox, an' scarlet-fever, an' dip —"

"Oh, choke off on that awhile," laughed David, handing Chick some fresh-made doughnuts bought while the horse was being hitched up.

The citizens of another village, through which they passed, at decidedly a funeral gait, shortly after, gazed, fascinated with mingled astonishment and horror, at the sight of three boys calmly eating their noonday meal while seated in such an unheard-of buffet. "Purty lively corpses," remarked one. "New-fangled lunch-wagon" commented another.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN UPSET CANOE

WHILE launching the canoe the next morning, the dried and brittle deer-thongs, upon which the bow seat depended, gave way. A barrel-stave, picked up at the water's edge, was made to do duty as a seat by the simple means of laying it across the gunwales.

At noontime, when the boys landed for luncheon, they unloaded the canoe and made camp as it was proposed that they go no farther that day, in order that the afternoon might be devoted to fishing.

After the midday sun began to beat a little less fiercely on the waters, the fishermen set forth upon their conquest. They paddled up-stream and beneath an iron bridge, with the idea of trying their luck in a cove just above. Here, the farmer, upon whose land they had pitched their camp, had predicted they might find their reward.

Scarcely had they gone a hundred feet above the bridge, than the barrel-stave — an untrustworthy affair showing the ravages of time — broke off sharply at the inner side of the right gunwale. In a flash, Chick, who was seated thereon, was thrown violently against the side with such force that the canoe quickly rolled bottom-upwards, with Chick and David squirming like monkeys to keep on top. They did this so well that each kept his head above water, and grinned unconcernedly at the other while clinging to opposite ends of the drifting craft.

But where was Sinker, who, a moment before, had been so happily seated amidships on the bottom of the canoe? For the moment, his friends, in the suddenness of their bath, had entirely forgotten their chum's existence. The canoe had trapped a considerable amount of air, in its sudden overturn, so was riding pretty high on the water. Chick and David were now on opposite sides each with an arm over an end. Thus the canoe rode evenly.

"Say, where's Sinker?" suddenly cried David with a white face, beginning to comprehend the situation.

"Gosh, that's so! Where is he?" Chick re-

turned, staring about in growing fright. They searched eagerly and then looked blankly at one another.

"Gotter do sumpthin', quick!" David shouted. "Spose he's drowned?"

Thereupon, they were relieved as well as horrified at the sight of a hand, about half-way between them, giving one or two weak attempts to clutch at the slippery bottom of the canoe. Their blood ran cold as they stared glumly at what they believed to be the last earthly effort of the drowning Sinker. Then the ghastly clutches at the glassy bottom ceased, and David, with his eyes glued with horror and fascination to the spot, beheld the head of his beloved chum about a foot under water, and drifting slowly away from them. "Keep the canoe where she is!" he shouted, letting go his hold and striking out with all his strength.

But Sinker, true to his alias, was sinking rapidly. David had him well located, however, so, with faultless direction, plunged head-first after, in daring pursuit. Grasping his friend by the shoulder, and using his free limbs with great energy, they soon reached the surface, David panting hard. Sinker, with the convulsive force

of a drowning person, now set his arms around his rescuer's neck, to the great danger of both. David's strong swimming power served him well; and well did he need it, for making a mighty effort to break Sinker's grip — the fatal grip of the drowning — he tried to keep himself afloat by vigorous leg-action.

It was useless. Down they went just as David succeeded in getting his neck free from the dangerous grip of his half-conscious friend.

In the meantime, Chick was doing his utmost to prevent the canoe from being driven away by the light breeze that had sprung up.

Again David, upon whose strength and wind the struggle was beginning to tell, battled to the surface. And then again did Sinker fasten himself to his friend's neck. There now came to David's mind a long-forgotten remark of Billy Paradise's, that the way to free one's self from the clutches of a drowning man is to strike him a hard blow in the face, but David immediately banished the temptation as unworthy and cowardly. Matters, therefore, looked tragic. David glanced towards the canoe; it was some fifteen feet away and slightly up stream; Chick was doing all in his power to force it towards the

weakening pair. Once more, David wrenched at the arms, so disastrously wound about his neck, and once more was the whole situation about to repeat itself. David well knew he did not have the staying powers to bring Sinker to the surface more than once again, and even was doubtful of so good an outcome as that.

However, there was nothing else to do, so he ceased swimming with his hands, and once more broke the grip. Again he felt himself about to sink when his feet brushed something. In their struggles, they had drifted under the bridge. With dawning hope, David gripped on to the thing his feet had touched; gripped with his toes, and — fatherly advice to the contrary notwithstanding — it was very fortunate that the son, in this case, was barefooted. For some minutes, it was a struggle, with doubtful issue, before David was able to stay his drifting long enough to work into an upright position on so precarious a foothold. He was now heedless of Sinker's action. If a balance could be maintained long enough for Chick to work the canoe within reach, all would be well. There was no danger of his losing Sinker, for that irresponsible person clung to his companion's neck like a leech, and so in-

dissolubly locked together were the two that their fates were now unhappily the same.

The thing down in the water that so opportunely furnished a footing, at this critical period, was the top of an old wooden pile, no longer needed after the antiquated wooden bridge had given place to the more efficient iron structure, and sawed off when the water was unusually low.

The depth at which the top of the pile was submerged was such that David could just reach it with his toes, and, at the same time, hold his own head barely above the surface. It was no light affair to stick there under so ticklish circumstances and preserve an equilibrium while holding Sinker's wabbling head above the water.

Perceiving that David's strength was well nigh spent, Chick, with a burst of energy, took a desperate chance. To fight against the wind was becoming useless, for now the space between the canoe and the marooned pair, was increasing, with his strength fast growing less. By a great effort, pointing the canoe in what he hoped was the right direction, he braced himself as well as he was able, threw all his remaining force into one great push, and sent it, with ever diminishing velocity, towards David and Sinker.

An upturned canoe, even with a goodly amount of air buoying it up, is an unwieldy affair. Chick had headed it a little to one side of his friends expecting the wind and current to play their parts. So, thus, he placed all on one chance. Slower and slower floated the desperate boy's last hope; ten feet more to go; then five; then it seemed to come to almost a dead stop. David watched it with staring eyes of hope. Another foot and the thing seemed about to slip away from him. He, too, now took a chance. Swiftly, he twisted Sinker's body around on to his own back, and, securing such feeble advantage in the way of a start as the deep pile afforded, sprang out and swam both with hands and feet, trusting to Sinker's half-conscious hold to prevent his falling off. The cumbersome dead weight was a great handicap to this dangerous venture, and the now increased distance to safety was only covered by the merest chance; a few seconds later start certainly would have meant failure.

Feebly, David's fingers gripped the little tow ring, dangling from the bow, just under water. Here he held fast, carefully looking to the safety of his burden.

Chick had turned himself upon his back and floated until he recovered some of the strength expended so violently in his well-calculated effort to save the day, and thus revived sufficiently to take a hand by swimming to the other end of the canoe where he strove to propel it ashore together with its load. This was no great task, for now the wind proved friendly, any direction being desirable, so long as they made land. The hundred feet or so to the shore were slowly covered. Although he was much concerned in keeping Sinker's head above the surface, David gave some help by swimming with his legs. He had succeeded in keeping his friend's face out of water ever since their one nearly fatal plunge when locked together, and now something like sense seemed to be stirring in the pallid face of the half-drowned boy.

Weak, after their exertions, they dragged him slowly on to the shore from the water. Knowing no better method, and believing Sinker's lungs to be full of water, they laid his stomach across a log and sat on his back. It was crude, but effective. Floods of water poured forth in response to their efforts. Thanks to David's

prompt measures, Sinker had never reached that desperate stage of partial drowning when artificial breathing is needed for the purposes of restoration. It was not long before his usually sunny face showed marked signs of returning consciousness. Soon after, the agony of his friends' suspense was set at rest by the opening of his eyes, followed presently by a smile of recognition.

Some weeks later, David and Chick were overwhelmed upon receiving two exquisite little gold watches bearing, beneath each boy's name, the heartfelt legend:

"IN GRATEFUL APPRECIATION
OF AN ACT OF BRAVERY
FROM
ROSWELL DUNCAN PEACHAM"

Thus did Sinker's father show his gratitude for the courageous self-forgetfulness shown in the saving of his son's life. So, after all, David was at last comforted for the great chagrin suffered at the time of the athletic contest about the dining-room table, and the loss of the hoped-for trophy of a silver watch.

And here let us leave them. Chick and the erstwhile mutilator of his face had now lived in peace for several weeks. Through the humorous efforts of Mrs. Hamilton, advantage was taken of this period of rest from warfare to secure a picture of their visitor that it might be sent to the boy's mother in token of a lasting truce.

In spite of Sinker's narrow escape from an untimely watery grave, in company with Chick, he was allowed to repeat his visits to the Hamilton home for many succeeding summers. Here the doings of the three comrades continued to lend more than passing spice to the surroundings, as well as to the perennial disquietude of mind of the venerable Billy Paradise.

Regardless of however well David, in his many-sided youthful career, may have deserved our appellation of "The Village Pest," let us hope that there was a side to his nature reaching deeper than the usual pranks of his age; a readiness to sacrifice all to the integrity of friendship. Never, as boy or man, did he go back on a friend, nor could he ever forgive such a breach of faith on the part of another. Not once, when trying to save Sinker from drowning, did it occur to him to retreat and save himself.

Let this trait in his character plead forgiveness for some of the uneasy moments into which he plunged other members of his family as well as the long-suffering neighbors.

THE END